



Kentucky Rural Health Association  
36 South Alvasia Street  
Henderson KY 42420  
Phone: (270) 577-1707  
[krha@twc.com](mailto:krha@twc.com) or [kentuckyruralhealthassociation@gmail.com](mailto:kentuckyruralhealthassociation@gmail.com)  
[www.kyrha.org](http://www.kyrha.org)

August 8, 2020

Dear Senator McConnell,

The Kentucky Rural Health Association's (KRHA) mission is to advocate for the state's rural health issues to assure equitable access to health care for rural Kentuckians. In that pursuit, KRHA sincerely requests you to support the senate bill S. 3599, the Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act. In alignment with NRHA, the National Rural Health Association, KRHA stands with any policy that is designed to deliver better healthcare to the citizens of Kentucky.

As you are in the process of developing the HEALS Act and the associated health care policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we strongly believe that S.3599 can bring a solution to the everlasting chronic medical problems of rural Kentucky and also bolster the workforce that can deliver the care of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

At least 40% of Kentuckians live in rural areas, only 17 % of primary care physicians practice in rural areas. Kentucky ranks 40th in the number of primary care physicians per 100,000 population. 69 counties have 10 or less number of primary care physicians per county in Kentucky. We also assessed that 65 of Kentucky's 129 hospitals are rural and one fourth of the rural hospitals in the state are at risk of closure. Cancer mortality rate in Kentucky is 17% more than national average and the estimated cancer burden on the state is 3.8 billion dollars in 2020. 53.5% of patients with mental health could not have access to treatment. Kentucky also has the highest incidence of COPD in the country (one in every 10 residents). The COVID-19 pandemic has bestowed further strain on the healthcare of our state. More than 20,000 cases of COVID-19 recorded in our state by July and cases have been reported in every single county.

Kentucky has been fortunate to have a significant number of US trained International Medical Graduates (IMGs) in the state. About 21% of the Kentucky physician workforce (one in every 5 physicians) is an international physician. There has never been a more urgent need for the care that international physicians and nurses provide to the state than during the current COVID-19 pandemic. These are highly skilled professionals and play a vital role in ensuring the health of our rural communities. The demand for healthcare workers continues to grow every year and during the current health crisis the need is greater than ever. Many of them provide care at our rural and inner-city hospitals, locations that usually find it difficult to recruit physicians. They do not displace the existing American workers.

This legislation was Introduced by Senator Perdue of Georgia, the Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act enjoys strong bi-partisan support. This legislation makes some changes to the visa program and would help to ensure that the state has proper staffing to address the current health crisis and beyond. This legislation assists the physicians with immigrant visas who are already working in the United States by offering them a targeted allocation of recaptured visas. The physicians assisted with the provisions in this bill will have more flexibility in their work assignments and will be better able to lend their skills where they are most needed instead of being tied up by their immigration requirements.

We appreciate your time and effort to visit the rural Kentucky hospitals recently and you might have observed that many such hospitals are heavily dependent on the international physicians and nurses to deliver the care to our underserved population. KRHA appreciates your leadership and understanding of the critical care international physicians and nurses provide to Kentucky's hospitals and how urgent the need is for additional health care providers and flexibility with work assignments at this time.

With this, we urge you to include the bill S.3599 into the HEALS Act and ensure the success of this legislation. KRHA strongly believes that this bill will have a huge impact on the ability to care for patients with COVID-19 and other chronic medical problems and issues that our rural state has been facing.

Thank you again for your leadership on the healthcare challenges of the rural Americans and especially rural Kentuckians.

Sincerely,

Tina McCormick, Executive Director