



August 31, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1236 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi:

Community Medical Centers' (CMC) healthcare system is the largest healthcare provider in California's Central San Joaquin Valley. This includes Community Regional Medical Center (CRMC) – located in Fresno and the flagship facility of Community Medical Centers – which is one of the state's largest safety-net hospitals with one of the highest volumes for Medi-Cal inpatient discharges in California. CRMC is the region's only comprehensive burn and Level 1 Trauma Center between Sacramento and Los Angeles.

In addition, our region's physician-per-capita ratio is low — about 39 primary care physicians per 100,000 people, versus 64 primary care physicians per 100,000 in the San Francisco Bay Area and 50 per 100,000 for California overall. The disparity is even wider when it comes to access to specialty care — 65 specialists per 100,000 people in the San Joaquin Valley, versus 138 specialists per 100,000 in the Bay Area and 104 per 100,000 for California overall. In addition, California HealthCare Foundation research indicates only 64% of the state's primary care physicians are accepting new Medi-Cal patients; 41% of the Valley's population is covered by Medi-Cal.

Since March, our physicians, nurses and other clinicians have been on the front lines providing care to area COVID-19 patients in our underserved region. In light of the current COVID-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever to ensure adequate health care provider availability in our nation's healthcare system. Immigrant physicians are a critical part of providing quality healthcare, particularly in rural and underserved areas of the United States. Organizations such as the Bipartisan Policy Center and American Medical Association have outlined policy recommendations to reduce barriers for foreign healthcare workers to practice in the United States. As a hospital that is impacted by the backlog of visas for foreign medical professionals, we are writing in support of these recommendations.

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The limits on H-1B visas and backlogs in the program create a particular challenge for CMC. Currently, 29% of the hospitalists practicing at CMC are on H-1B temporary non-immigrant visas waiting for approval to become permanent residents. Since permanent resident visas are capped annually, the temporary visas must be extended on a regular basis to allow these professionals to continue practicing. In addition, many are also impacted by the per country visa limitations, making the waiting period for green cards stretch into decades. The uncertainty this causes for our valued medical professionals has significant impact and exacts a toll on them and their families. We rely on their services and should recognize their long-term contributions to our country.

One of our own practicing hospitalists, Dr. Amtinder Batth, has a compelling story of waiting several years to receive his citizenship. As an integral physician within CMC and an upstanding citizen, he has planted roots in our community where he is raising his family. As he patiently waits for solutions to this issue, it is unreasonable for him to live under a veil of uncertainty regarding his H-1B visa status.

For these reasons, CMC is in support of the following policy recommendations to address this issue:

- Fast track immigration benefits for healthcare professionals.
- Immediately expand the number of permanent resident visas available to healthcare professionals and waive the per country limitations to address current backlogs, especially those who are working in facilities in underserved areas.
- Allow hospitalists on H-1B visas to work in hospitals that have not sponsored their visas so that they are available to re-deploy to areas most impacted.

As Congress continues working on legislation to address the COVID-19 pandemic, we ask that you consider these policy recommendations as critical to include any future legislation.

Sincerely,



Craig S. Castro  
President & Chief Executive Officer

cc: Dr. Amtinder Batth