

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 29, 2020

Acting Secretary Chad Wolf
Department of Homeland Security
301 7th Street SW
Washington, DC 20528-0150

Dear Secretary Wolf:

As supporters of the Conrad State 30 program and advocates for its continued success, we write to you with concern about the proposed Department of Homeland Security (DHS) changes to the Duration of Status regulations. J-1 physicians are an essential part of the U.S. health care system with more than 12,000 J-1 physicians studying and serving patients, across more than 50 medical specialties and subspecialties, at teaching hospitals across the country. We believe that these proposed changes would have serious detrimental impacts on foreign-born physicians currently in the U.S. on J-1 visas, resulting in a direct blow to public health resources in the middle of a global pandemic.

Under current regulations that have been in place for nearly 35 years, the more than 12,000 foreign-born physicians pursuing their residency in the U.S. under J-1 visas must annually renew their visa through the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG), which oversees all foreign medical graduate J-1 visa holders in the U.S. in coordination with the Department of State (DOS). Because medical residency can operate on a dynamic timeline based on specialty, currently J-1 visa holders do not have end dates on their visas in order to avoid cutting short their training based on an arbitrary timeline. That is why current J-1 visa holders have their duration of status automatically extended upon successful annual review by ECFMG – streamlining the process to avoid any unnecessary interruption to their medical residency. J-1 physicians are also tracked in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), a joint database of DOS and DHS. Additionally, each teaching hospital that trains J-1 physicians assigns at least one staff member to communicate directly with ECFMG to confirm the J-1 physicians ongoing participation in residency programs.

Under the Department's proposed changes, J-1 physicians that take part in ECFMG's annual review process would no longer automatically receive an extension of their authorized stay. J-1 physicians would instead need to annually submit an Application to Extend/Change Nonimmigrant Status (Form I-539), which can take upwards of 19 months to complete—a timeline incompatible with the 3-5 month contracting lead time typical of most residencies and fellowships. As a result, these proposed changes would prevent a wide swath of foreign-born residents from completing their training in the U.S. If finalized, these DHS regulatory changes will lead to thousands of foreign medical graduates being unable to continue to provide crucial care to patients while COVID-19 still presents numerous challenges to the United States.

Additionally, the Conrad State 30 program is meant to operate seamlessly from medical residency programs to foreign-born physicians working in medically underserved areas. Under current practice, these new doctors are able to transfer directly from their J-1 residency to practicing in Conrad State 30 programs in every state. By diminishing the domestic pool of foreign-born doctors and arbitrarily cutting

short their U.S.-based training, the changes DHS has proposed would directly threaten the Conrad State 30 program.

These unnecessary changes overcomplicate the process at the expense of foreign-born physicians. And because many of these physicians go on to serve across the country as Conrad State 30 recipients, the changes would severely restrict the number of physicians eligible to participate in the program—all the more serious during an ongoing global pandemic, particularly since these doctors serve in the areas of highest need.

We strongly agree with the medical stakeholders across the country who have raised serious concerns about these proposed changes. We urge you to reconsider how these changes apply to the J-1 visa process, especially with consideration to how these changes would impact the Conrad State 30 program.

Thank you for considering our request. Should you have any questions about how these proposed changes would impact immediate access to care and the Conrad State 30 program, please do not hesitate to reach out to our staffs.

Sincerely,



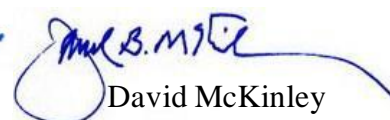
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