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The Honorable Darrell Issa
United States House of Representatives
2347 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Congressman Issa:

On behalf of the physician and medical student members of the American Medical Association (AMA), I want to express our support for H.R. 2131, the "SKILLS Visa Act," which would permanently reauthorize and make improvements to the J-1 visa waiver program.

Many communities, including rural and low-income urban areas, have problems attracting physicians to meet their health care needs. To address these unmet needs, many of these communities have turned to international medical graduates. International medical graduates comprise approximately 27 percent of residents and fellows in the United States and 25 percent of all practicing physicians. The use of J-1 visa waivers is a significant means of placing physicians in communities that face health care access challenges.

The permanent reauthorization of the J-1 visa waiver program will provide incentives for physicians to practice in medically underserved areas without the uncertainty that the program will be discontinued. We also support provisions in this bill that would make improvements to the program, including requiring more transparency in employment contract terms, creating additional waivers per state for academic medical centers, and establishing a mechanism to increase the current cap on the number of visa waivers per state.

In addition, H.R. 2131 would make improvements to the immigration laws impacting physicians outside of the J-1 visa waiver program to help ensure continued access to care in medically underserved communities across the U.S. The legislation would establish a new program to issue up to 55,000 green cards a year to foreign graduates of U.S. universities with advanced science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) degrees, including physicians who have received a medical degree or completed a medical residency at a U.S. university.

We appreciate your leadership on this important issue and look forward to working with you to advance this legislation.

Sincerely,

James L. Madara, MD