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The Honorable Heidi Heitkamp
United States Senate
110 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Heitkamp:

On behalf of the physician and medical student members of the American Medical Association (AMA), I want to express our support for S. 1189, the “Conrad State 30 and Physician Access Act,” which would permanently reauthorize and make improvements to the J-1 visa waiver program.

The use of J-1 visa waivers is a significant means of placing physicians in communities that face health care access challenges. Many communities, including rural and low-income urban areas, have problems attracting physicians to meet their patient needs. To address this concern, states have turned to international medical graduates to fill open positions and provide needed care.

If enacted, this legislation would permanently reauthorize the J-1 visa waiver program, providing incentives for physicians to practice in medically underserved areas without the uncertainty that the program will be discontinued. Also, we support provisions in this bill that would make improvements to the program by exempting physicians upon completion of their service requirement from green card caps, 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.

The “Conrad State 30 and Physician Access Act” will help ensure continued access to care in medically underserved communities across the U.S. We appreciate your leadership on this important issue and look forward to working with you to advance this legislation.

Sincerely,

James L. Madara, MD