

June 26, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
600 19th Street NW,
Washington, DC 20006

The Honorable Chad Wolf
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

RE: Executive Order Negatively Impacting H-1B and J-1 Physicians and Their Families

Dear Secretary Pompeo and Acting Secretary Wolf:

I am writing on behalf of the physician and medical student members of the American Medical Association (AMA) to strongly **urge the Administration to consider J-1 and H-1B International Medical Graduates (IMGs) and their families' entry into the U.S. to be in the national interest of the country**, so that these physicians can enter the U.S. in a timely manner and begin providing valuable medical services to U.S. patients and ease the burden on the U.S. physician workforce.

On June 22, 2020, the President of the United States issued an executive order: [Proclamation Suspending Entry of Aliens Who Present a Risk to the U.S. Labor Market Following the Coronavirus Outbreak](#). This proclamation contains a narrow carve out for “[individuals that] are involved with the provision of medical care to individuals who have contracted COVID-19 and are currently hospitalized; [or] are involved with the provision of medical research at United States facilities to help the United States combat COVID-19...” This carve out is too narrow and fails to exempt a large portion of the IMGs that come to the U.S. to practice in a wide range of medical specialties.

In 2017, nearly 30 percent of medical residents in the U.S. were IMGs, with about half working as physicians in the U.S. on non-immigrant visas, such as J-1 and H-1B.¹ Halting entry into the U.S. for IMGs until the end of December, and potentially longer, would cause this year's July 1, 2020, IMG residents whose visas were delayed due to worldwide COVID-19-related closures of consulate offices to arrive at their training hospitals months late and may cause them to lose their residency slots. This will leave U.S. hospitals short staffed in the middle of a pandemic. The AMA believes that any delay in the commencement of training programs will significantly compromise serving our nation's most vulnerable patients at hundreds of academic medical centers and safety-net facilities across the U.S.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. was already facing a serious shortage of physicians largely due to the growth and aging of the general population and the impending retirement of many physicians.² Nearly 21 million people live in areas of the U.S. where foreign-trained physicians account for at least

¹ <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/reports/2019/07/29/472619/immigrant-doctors-can-help-lower-physician-shortages-rural-america/>.

² <https://www.aamc.org/news-insights/press-releases/new-findings-confirm-predictions-physician-shortage>.

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half of all physicians.³ As such, non-U.S. citizen IMGs play a critical role in providing health care to many Americans, especially in areas of the country with higher rates of poverty and chronic disease. For example, over the past 10 years, more than 10,000 J-1 IMGs have worked in underserved communities.⁴ Thus,, the entry of every IMG is in the national interest of the U.S. especially during the pandemic, when physicians are needed in every specialty more than ever.

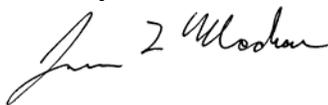
We also urge the Administration to protect the spouses and dependent children of our J-1 and H-1B physicians by exempting their J-2 and H-4 family members from the current immigration ban. The spouses and children of our physicians, who are entering the U.S. to provide critical health care to patients across the U.S., should not be separated from one another, especially during a global pandemic.

Moreover, the current ban on J-2 and H-4 family members disproportionately impacts parents. J-1 physicians stay for the time typically required to complete their specialty or subspecialty training requirements with a maximum stay of about 7 years, while H-1B physicians can remain in the U.S. for 3 years or more. This means that parent IMGs who are able to enter the U.S. to help treat COVID-19 patients, per the carve out, may be forced to make the impossible decision of leaving behind young children for years or coming to train in the U.S. To force mothers and fathers to choose whether to be separated from their children and spouses, or take a position treating some of America's sickest patients, in some of our most underserved areas, is unfair. It also will cause the U.S. to surpass its projected shortfall of nearly 122,000 physicians by 2032, leaving innumerable U.S. patients without a physician.⁵

The U.S. health care workforce relies upon health professionals and scientists from other countries to provide high-quality and accessible patient care.⁶ As such, during this pandemic, it is more critical than ever to ensure that the U.S. has a fair and efficient immigration system that strengthens the American health care system and advances the nation's health security. Thus, **the AMA strongly urges the Administration to consider J-1 and H-1B IMGs and their families' entry into the U.S. to be in the national interest of the country** so that families can remain together and IMG physicians can immediately begin to provide health care to U.S. patients.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



James L. Madara, MD

³ https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/foreign-trained_doctors_are_critical_to_serving_many_us_communities.pdf.

⁴ <https://www.kunr.org/post/visa-program-enables-foreign-doctors-work-underserved-communities#stream/0>.

⁵ <https://www.aamc.org/news-insights/press-releases/new-findings-confirm-predictions-physician-shortage>.

⁶ https://www.supremecourt.gov/DocketPDF/17/17-965/40128/20180327105855912_17-965%20Amicus%20Br.%20Proclamation.pdf