

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 23, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

Our nation has long faced a significant shortage of both physicians and nurses, and the coronavirus crisis is only making this problem more acute. As Congress debates how best to lead our nation through this crisis, we urge you to include the bipartisan, bicameral Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act, S.3599 and H.R.6788, in the next coronavirus relief package. This legislation, which we introduced earlier this year to quickly strengthen our national response to the pandemic, has received strong support from our nation's medical community.

The Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act has 36 bipartisan sponsors from 30 states in the Senate. In the House of Representatives, the Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act has nearly 60 bipartisan sponsors from more than 25 states. Additionally, an incredibly diverse coalition of more than 70 medical societies, trade associations, and other stakeholders have endorsed this proposal, including the American Medical Association, American Hospital Association, Federation of American Hospitals, Healthcare Leadership Council, American College of Physicians, American Academy of Pediatrics, National Rural Health Association, and Physicians for American Healthcare Access.

In June 2020, the American Association of Medical Colleges (AAMC) projected that our nation will be facing a shortage of between 54,100 and 139,000 physicians in primary and specialty care by 2033. The AAMC found that this shortage is being driven by an increase in demand for care as our nation's population ages. They also noted that nearly 40 percent of our current medical workforce will be at or near retirement age within the next decade.

The prognosis is even worse for our nation's rural and medically underserved communities. For underserved populations, the provider shortage could increase by an additional 74,100 to 145,500

physicians. Polling from the AAMC found that 35 percent of voters have reported issues finding a doctor in the past two or three years – a 10 percent increase since 2015.^[1]

Similarly, the Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics forecasts that our country’s need for nurses will grow by 12 percent from 2018 to 2028. The average growth rate for all occupations over that same window is projected to be five percent.^[2] The American Association of Colleges of Nursing found that low enrollment in U.S. nursing schools, a faculty shortage at U.S. nursing schools, an aging workforce, and our aging population will continue to exacerbate these shortages.^[3]

These physician and nursing shortages are harming our hospitals’ ability to respond to this crisis. Cynthia Cox, Vice President of the Kaiser Family Foundation, noted, “There is a very real risk of provider shortages in the areas hit hard by the coronavirus, both because of increased patient numbers and doctors and nurses falling ill from or being exposed to the virus.”^[4] Kaiser Health News recently reported that medical personnel may account for up to 20 percent of all known coronavirus cases.^[5] The widespread effects of the coronavirus on our medical personnel, coupled with our already-existing medical worker shortages, significantly undermine the resilience of our healthcare workforce.

While our hospitals struggle to find the medical workers they need, we have thousands of nurses caught overseas waiting to get to work in our hospitals. These nurses have already been approved by the Department of Homeland Security to work in our hospitals but cannot due to bureaucratic red tape. Likewise, thousands of physicians are present in our country, but caught in the green card backlog. These physicians are unnecessarily subject to onerous restrictions that prevent them from efficiently applying their training and expertise to best meet our healthcare needs.

We introduced the Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act to address this growing problem. Our bipartisan bill will quickly infuse our hospitals with the trained medical workers they need to weather this crisis by cutting the red tape that undermines the resilience of our healthcare workforce. It cuts red tape by recapturing unused visas and allocating them to these doctors, nurses, and their immediate families. The bill provides a one-time authorization of up to 25,000 recaptured visas for professional nurses and 15,000 recaptured visas for physicians. Data from the Department of Homeland Security and the State Department shows that there are more than 200,000 unused employment-based visas currently available for recapture. Congress authorized these visas in prior fiscal years, but they have gone unused.

^[1] American Association of Medical Colleges, “The Complexities of Physician Supply and Demand: Projections From 2018 to 2033,” <https://www.aamc.org/system/files/2020-06/stratcomm-aamc-physician-workforce-projections-june-2020.pdf>. Last Updated: June 2020; Accessed: July 20, 2020.

^[2] U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook, Registered Nurses, <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/registered-nurses.htm>. Last Updated: April 10, 2020; Accessed: July 20, 2020.

^[3] American Association of Colleges of Nursing, “Nursing Shortage” Fact Sheets, News & Information, <https://www.aacnnursing.org/news-information/fact-sheets/nursing-shortage>. Last Updated: April 1, 2019; Accessed: July 20, 2020.

^[4] Nicole Narea, “The US needs foreign doctors and nurses to fight coronavirus. Immigration policy isn’t helping.” *Vox*, <https://www.vox.com/2020/3/30/21190971/foreign-immigrant-doctor-nurse-coronavirus>. Last Updated: March 30, 2020; Accessed: July 20, 2020.

^[5] Kaiser Health News, “Lost on the Front Line,” <https://khn.org/news/lost-on-the-frontline-health-care-worker-death-toll-covid19-coronavirus/>. Last Updated, July 17, 2020; Accessed: July 20, 2020.

Now, these inefficiencies are holding back our nation's response to the coronavirus by keeping already-approved medical workers from serving in the hospitals that need their help.

All physicians and nurses who would benefit from this bill must meet stringent licensing requirements, be fluent in English, pay required filing fees, and clear rigorous national security and criminal history background checks before they can receive a recaptured visa. Additionally, to ensure that medical professionals receiving visas from overseas will complement our existing domestic medical workforce, our bill requires that petitioners for nurses who receive a recaptured visa must attest that they have not and will not displace an American worker.

We urge you to strengthen our nation's path toward recovery by including the Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act in the next coronavirus relief package.

Sincerely,



David A. Perdue
United States Senator



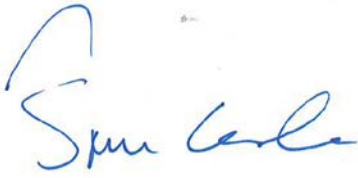
Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Todd Young
United States Senator



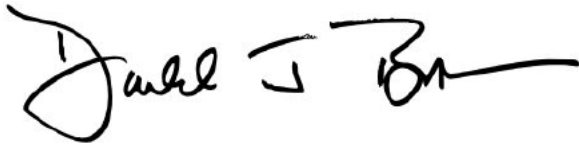
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