



Issue: The Conrad State 30 and Physician Access Reauthorization Act

CAP Position: The CAP urges Congress to pass legislation to address the physician shortage. Pathologists are physicians who specialize in disease diagnosis and oversee laboratory testing. Pathologist expertise directly guides treatment decisions and optimizes outcomes for patients; it is crucial to mitigate this physician shortage as the Medicare population continues to grow. The Conrad 30 waiver program allows qualified international medical graduates (IMGs) to serve in underserved communities and would help to address the physician workforce shortage.

Background:

The United States is facing a shortage of up to 124,000 physicians by 2034. IMGs are an important part of our nation's health care system and currently represent 25% of the physician workforce. Non-U.S. IMGs represented 33.6% of first year pathology resident trainees in the United States in 2022 and 27% in 2023. Non-U.S. IMGs play a critical role in providing health care, especially in underserved areas of the country with higher rates of poverty and chronic disease. Significant resources are invested in training these physicians and it is in our national interest to retain these highly skilled individuals, especially during the current workforce crisis, when physicians are needed in every specialty. Non-U.S. IMGs who are required to return to their home country may never return to practice in the United States.

Under current law, J-1 visas require non-U.S. IMGs to return to their country of origin for at least two years upon completion of their residency, unless a Conrad 30 waiver is obtained. This two-year home country requirement places undue strain on the United States physician workforce and has caused numerous communities to miss out on the services that qualified physicians can provide. Data from the CAP's 2023 Practice Leader Survey showed that visa issues impacted hiring decisions for 27% of practice leaders seeking to hire a pathologist in the prior two years. This included numerous instances where the leaders were simply unable to hire certain candidates or made the decision to not even consider a candidate due to visa issues.

Non-U.S. IMGs play a necessary role in alleviating the physician workforce shortage and expanding access to critical patient care in rural and underserved communities. Through the Conrad 30 waiver program, non-U.S. IMGs are required to work in an area designated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as a Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA), Medically Underserved Area (MUA), or Medically Underserved Population (MUP) before they are eligible to apply for an immigrant visa or permanent residence. The program allows these non-U.S. IMGs to provide necessary patient care immediately upon finishing their training.

As such, the CAP supports and urges passage of the Conrad State 30 and Physician Access Reauthorization Act (S. 665/H.R. 4942), introduced by Sens. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) and Susan Collins (R-ME), and Reps. Brad Schneider (D-IL), Don Bacon (R-NE), Sylvia Garcia (D-TX), and David Valadao (R-CA). This bill would reauthorize the Conrad 30 waiver program for three years, make improvements to the program, and increase the number of waivers granted to each state.

In short, the CAP asks that you cosponsor the Conrad State 30 and Physician Access Reauthorization Act (S. 665/H.R. 4942). For More Information: Contact Darren Fenwick, Director of Legislative Affairs and Political Programs at (202) 354-7135 or by email at dfenwic@cap.org.