

# **Is There a Doctor in the House? The Role of Immigrant Physicians in the U.S. Healthcare System**

## **Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship Hearing**

**February 15, 2022**

### **Rep. Brad Schneider Statement for the Record**

The COVID-19 pandemic stretched our healthcare system thin—in some places to near the breaking point—exposing and exacerbating vulnerabilities in the system that existed before 2020. One area with particularly devastating impact was the daunting shortage of doctors in communities across the country. Consequently, we witnessed significant disparities in who received timely access to care, especially critical care. In particular, Americans living in rural communities were seven times more likely than those living in urban areas to report difficulties accessing the health care they need.

I have always worked to ensure that health care is a right in this country for every American, not just a privilege for the fortunate. We can't achieve that goal if people are not able to find doctors they trust, when they need care, close to their home. Yet, it is estimated that the United States could face a shortage of as many as 120,000 physicians by 2030. Closing this gap is essential.

As discussed in this hearing, the Conrad State 30 program has been instrumental in helping to reduce the physician shortage. Since 1994, this program has brought thousands of foreign physicians, trained in the United States, to rural, inner city, and other medically underserved communities. Under current law, foreign medical students trained in the U.S. are required to return to their home country for two years after completing their residency. Under Conrad 30, however, these highly skilled physicians can remain in the country in exchange for three years of service in an underserved area. Indicative of the wide-spread benefits of the program, Congress has reauthorized Conrad 30 several times, and every state makes use of the program for the benefit of their communities.

For the past several years, the Conrad State 30 program has been routinely authorized through appropriations legislation, limited to one year at a time. The uncertainty around short-term annual reauthorizations reduces the full effect of the program. That is why I introduced the Conrad State 30 & Physician Access Act (H.R. 35410), bipartisan legislation that would both extend the Conrad State 30 Waiver program and expand on its proven success.

My bill achieves four important objectives.

- (1) It extends authorization of the program for three years.
- (2) It improves the process for obtaining a visa and bolsters important workplace protections for recipients.
- (3) It provides a path to increase the number of waivers available to states.
- (4) The bill also allows the spouses of doctors to work in the United States, providing these physicians the needed stability to remain here and working in underserved communities.

As the pandemic hopefully wanes, the time to act is now. We can't afford to continue allowing the disparities in access to qualified, capable physicians.

I thank Chairwoman Lofgren for holding this important hearing and I look forward to bringing my legislation to the floor. We must continue working together to tackle the physician shortage and ensure that all Americans, regardless of their zip code, get the medical care they need.