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July 1, 2021

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The Honorable Amy Klobuchar  
425 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jacky Rosen  
144 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins  
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Joni Ernst  
730 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Klobuchar, Collins, Rosen and Ernst:

On behalf of the American Psychiatric Association (APA), the national medical specialty association representing over 37,400 psychiatric physicians, I write in support the *Conrad State 30 and Physician Access Reauthorization Act (S.1810)* and to thank you for your commitment to those who treat patients with mental health and substance abuse disorders.

A persistent shortage of psychiatrists and other mental health professionals contributes to the lack of access across the country but is especially acute in rural areas. According to the Health Resources and Services Administration,<sup>1</sup> while the supply of adult psychiatrists is expected to decrease 20% by 2030, the demand for their services is expected to increase by 3%, leaving a shortage of over 12,000 fully-trained psychiatrists.

International medical graduates (IMGs) play a critical role in helping to fill this gap, as approximately 30% of active psychiatrists<sup>2</sup> are IMGs. IMGs are essential in providing care across our country, particularly in mental health professional shortage areas<sup>3</sup> where nearly 120 million Americans live. IMGs make up almost a quarter of the total graduate medical education and practicing physician workforce<sup>4</sup>. Given IMGs important role, your proposed reauthorization of the Conrad State 30 J-1 visa waiver program would help to address the shortage of psychiatrists in health professional shortage areas, along with other physicians.

In addition to the current and projected physician workforce shortage, the ongoing COVID-19 public health emergency has highlighted the need for robust investments to address the nation's critical psychiatric workforce shortage. According to recent data<sup>5</sup> from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, of the 47.6 million adults with a mental illness, only 43.3% received any form of mental health care in the

<sup>1</sup>HRSA, "Behavioral Health Workforce Projections: 2017-2030", available at:

<https://bhwh.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/bhw/nchwa/projections/bh-workforce-projections-fact-sheet.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> American Association of Medical Colleges, "Active Physicians Who Are International Medical Graduates (IMGs) by Specialty, 2017", available at: <https://www.aamc.org/data-reports/workforce/interactive-data/active-physicians-who-are-international-medical-graduates-imgs-specialty-2017>.

<sup>3</sup> Health Resources and Services Administration, "Shortage Areas," available at: <https://data.hrsa.gov/topics/health-workforce/shortage-areas>.

<sup>4</sup> Journal of Graduate Medical Education, "International Medical Graduates in the US Physician Workforce and Graduate Medical Education: Current and Historical Trends." April 2018, available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5901803/#i1949-8357-10-2-214-b04>.

<sup>5</sup>SAMHSA, "Key Substance Use and Mental Health Indicators in the United States: Results from the 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health", available at: <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/cbhsq-reports/NSDUHNationalFindingsReport2018/NSDUHNationalFindingsReport2018.pdf> (August 2019).

past year, while only 11.1% of the people aged 12 or older who required substance use treatment received it at a facility specializing in addiction medicine. Unfortunately, the mental health and addiction workforce shortages that pre-dated the pandemic have only been exacerbated and, by some estimates<sup>6</sup>, as many as 154,000 more people could die from drug or alcohol abuse or suicide from the economic impact of COVID-19 alone. These figures do not account for the expanded need for mental health or addiction treatment for individuals coping with the loss of a loved one due to COVID-19.

The Conrad 30 State 30 J-1 visa waiver program serves the dual purposes of easing the administrative burdens for certain IMGs while boosting the workforce of physicians available to treat mental illness and addiction in rural and other medically underserved areas. In addition to reauthorizing this much needed program, S. 1810 wisely seeks to provide additional waivers for states that use at least 90% of their existing waiver capacity, while empowering the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to collect data on the usage of the visas and report that data to HHS and Congress. These provisions would allow the program to be more responsive to the needs of patients in states with an especially severe shortage of physicians.

Thank you for your leadership in introducing S. 1810. Please let us know how we can aid your efforts to advance this important legislation. If you have any questions, please contact Michelle Greenhalgh at [mgreenhalgh@psych.org](mailto:mgreenhalgh@psych.org) / 202.459.9708.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Saul Levin" followed by "MD, MPA" in smaller letters. There is a horizontal line under the name "Saul".

Saul Levin, MD, MPA, FRCP-E, FRCPsych  
CEO and Medical Director

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<sup>6</sup> Petterson, Steve et al. "Projected Deaths of Despair During the Coronavirus Recession" (May 8, 2020), available at: [https://wellbeingtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/WBT\\_Deaths-of-Despair\\_COVID-19-FINAL-FINAL.pdf](https://wellbeingtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/WBT_Deaths-of-Despair_COVID-19-FINAL-FINAL.pdf)



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The Honorable Brad Schneider  
300 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

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*CEO and Medical Director*

Dear Representative Schneider:

On behalf of the American Psychiatric Association (APA), the national medical specialty association representing over 37,400 psychiatric physicians, I write in support the *Conrad State 30 and Physician Access Reauthorization Act* (H.R. 3541) and to thank you for your commitment to those who treat patients with mental health and substance abuse disorders.

A persistent shortage of psychiatrists and other mental health professionals contributes to the lack of access across the country but is especially acute in rural areas. According to the Health Resources and Services Administration,<sup>1</sup> while the supply of adult psychiatrists is expected to decrease 20% by 2030, the demand for their services is expected to increase by 3%, leaving a shortage of over 12,000 fully-trained psychiatrists.

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Thank you for your leadership in introducing H.R. 3541. Please let us know how we can aid your efforts to advance this important legislation. If you have any questions, please contact Michelle Greenhalgh at [mgreenhalgh@psych.org](mailto:mgreenhalgh@psych.org) / 202.459.9708.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Saul Levin" followed by "MD, MPA" in smaller letters.

Saul Levin, MD, MPA, FRCP-E, FRCPSych  
CEO and Medical Director

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