

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1009

April 3, 2020

The Honorable Michael Pompeo
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Eugene Scalia
Secretary
U.S. Department of Labor
200 Constitution Ave, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20210

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave, S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20032

Dear Secretary Pompeo, Secretary Scalia, and Acting Secretary Wolf:

We are writing to request that you prioritize the processing of EB-3 visas for Schedule A nurses during the COVID-19 crisis. Our nation has long faced a significant shortage of nurses and health care workers, and this shortage now poses a risk to our medical system's ability to respond to this crisis. We ask that you prioritize the processing of these visas to ensure that our hospitals will have the critical care workers they need to lead our nation through this crisis.

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) has recognized that there "are not sufficient United States workers who are able, willing, and qualified" to serve as nurses. DOL has determined that any nurse brought to the United States will not affect "the working conditions of United States workers similarly employed" and will not "adversely affect" the wages of United States workers (20 C.F.R. §656.5).

DOL'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 5 percent.¹ 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 nursing shortages.² Our rural hospitals, which are essential to the health and well-being of those who do not live in a major metropolitan area, have acutely felt the impacts of these nurse shortages. We simply do not have the workforce here to fulfill our country's nursing needs.

¹ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook, Registered Nurses, <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/registered-nurses.htm>. Accessed: March 30, 2020.

² 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: March 30, 2020.

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Our nursing shortages will only further accelerate the damage the coronavirus will cause to our country. Cynthia Cox, Vice President of the Kaiser Family Foundation, recently noted that “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.”³

The federal government has already taken action to address provider shortages in our nation’s healthcare system. For instance, the Bureau of Consular Affairs at the U.S. Department of State recently encouraged medical professionals with approved U.S. immigrant or nonimmigrant visas to schedule visa interviews, so that they can to help our country assist with COVID-19 treatment efforts.⁴ The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) received waiver authority to re-hire retired VA healthcare workers to address this crisis.⁵ These actions show our federal government is aware of the compounding effects of our country’s provider shortage and the COVID-19 crisis on our healthcare system.

While these actions will provide relief to our nation’s doctors, they do not provide relief for our nation’s nursing staff who are working around the clock to fight this crisis. We ask that you use every authority provided to you under the law to expedite your processing of EB-3 visas for immigrant nurses, so that our hospitals can have the support they need as they combat this virus.

Nurses provide critical care to patients and their families. They help doctors extend the reach of their care. They are on the frontlines of our medical system’s work to combat the coronavirus. Our nation’s hospitals will be overwhelmed if they are not able to hire more nursing staff. We urge you to help our hospitals address this crisis by expediting your processing of visas for immigrant nurses.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



David A. Perdue
United States Senator



Kelly Loeffler
United States Senator



Bill Cassidy
United States Senator

³ 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: March 30, 2020.

⁴ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs, “Update on Visas for Medical Professionals,” <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/News/visas-news/update-on-h-and-j-visas-for-medical-professionals.html>. Last Updated: March 26, 2020; Accessed: March 30, 2020.

⁵ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs, “After OPM action, VA invites retired medical personnel back to work,” <https://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=5404>. Last Updated: March 26, 2020; Accessed: March 30, 2020.