

October 26, 2020

The Honorable Chad Wolf
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf,

As organizations that together represent over 590,000 frontline physicians, the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the American College of Physicians, the American Osteopathic Association, and the American Psychiatric Association write to share our strong concern about the proposed rule *Establishing a Fixed Time Period of Admission and an Extension of Stay Procedures for Individuals in F, J and I Status*. The rule proposes to change the way that DHS establishes the authorized period of stay for holders of F, J and I visa classifications by eliminating “duration of status” and replacing it with a specific end date. We strongly oppose this change specifically for J-1 physicians as this change will disrupt the training of thousands of physicians - physicians who already have been thoroughly vetted, already are serving on our nation’s health care teams, and already are carefully monitored during their time in the U.S. This will not accomplish the Administration’s goal of reducing visa overstays and will instead undermine our nation’s ability to respond to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

J-1 physicians are an essential part of the U.S. health care system. This rule will result in the considerable disruption of services at teaching hospitals where essential patient care is provided. More than 12,000 J-1 physicians train in more than 50 medical specialties and related subspecialties. While in training, they provide supervised patient care at nearly 750 teaching hospitals in 51 states and territories. Furthermore, J-1 physicians who remain in the United States after training are more likely to work in underserved areas, providing needed care to communities that lack a robust health care workforce. Restrictive visa policies for J-1 physicians threaten to limit the number of individuals from abroad who pursue training in the U.S. and make it more difficult for those who do overcome these added bureaucratic barriers to remain in the country after training.

We are in an unprecedented time during this public health emergency and global pandemic, when resident and fellow physicians have been redeployed in numerous parts of the country to care for COVID-19 patients, due to physician shortages. J-1 physicians play an important role in providing care in COVID-19 hot spots. This ongoing crisis has revealed an overburdened health care system that is stretched beyond its limit. Cutting back on our J-1 visa physician trainees will stretch our healthcare system even further.

We urge the Administration to specifically exclude J-1 physicians from this proposed rule. Not doing so will reduce our current physician workforce at a time when the nation is facing a

growing physician shortage and an unprecedented health care crisis, and place a considerable burden on remaining trainees, thus negatively affecting their training.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Family Physicians
American Academy of Pediatrics
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American College of Physicians
American Osteopathic Association
American Psychiatric Association