

American Association of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry

May 22, 2020

The Honorable David Perdue
455 Russell Senate Office Building
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Durbin
711 Hart Senate Office Building
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Perdue and Durbin:

On behalf of the medical students, residents, fellows, and physician members of the American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP), I write in support of S. 3599, the “Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act.” This bill would direct immigration authorities to recapture 15,000 unused visas from prior years and make them available to non-citizen international medical graduates (IMGs) and expedite the approval process of these applications. IMGs have found it nearly impossible to gain a visa, or get their current visa, and those for their family, renewed during this current pandemic.

It is unthinkable to limit our current physician workforce, particularly psychiatrists positioned to serve the impending mental health crisis resulting from the current pandemic and stay-at-home orders, standing in the way of adequately responding to the pandemic and beyond. Adding undue stress and uncertainty of whether or not a physician could work in the middle of a pandemic is illogical. Congress and the Administration must do everything possible to expand the physician workforce, especially the psychiatric workforce, which includes supporting lawfully present IMGs. IMGs are a critical part of the psychiatric workforce, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Recent data shows that 30.4 percent of child and adolescent psychiatrists are IMGs.¹

Prior to the pandemic, every state had a persistent severe or high shortage of child and adolescent psychiatrists,² limiting access to high-quality mental health care. Meanwhile, suicide is the second leading cause of death for those between the ages of 10 and 34.³ In 2018, over 14 percent of adolescents suffered from major depression, while 10 percent of all adolescents had a major

¹ Active Physicians Who are International Medical Graduates by Specialty, 2017. Association of American Medical Colleges, available at: <https://www.aamc.org/data-reports/workforce/interactive-data/active-physicians-who-are-international-medical-graduates-imgs-specialty-2017>.

² Workforce Maps by State. American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, available at: https://www.aacap.org/aacap/Advocacy/Federal_and_State_Initiatives/Workforce_Maps/Home.aspx.

³ Suicide Statistics. National Institute of Mental Health, available at: <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/suicide.shtml>.

depressive episode with severe impairment.⁴ One in five children have had or will suffer from a mental illness, a trend that is likely to rise given recent reports of increased need of mental health services. According to a recent report, upwards of 154,000 additional deaths by suicide, overdose, or alcohol will occur in the U.S. from the resulting despair caused by the economic downturn.⁵ There will be no greater need of quality, evidence-based mental health care from psychiatry in the months and years ahead, and one-third of all practicing child and adolescent psychiatrists, and their families, should not live in limbo fearing the loss of their legal status.

Thank you for your work on this important public health issue. AACAP stands ready to work with you to gain passage and enactment of your critical legislation. Should you have any questions or need additional information, please feel free to contact Ronald Szabat, Esq., Director, Government Affairs & Clinical Practice, at rszabat@aacap.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gabrielle A. Carlson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Gabrielle A. Carlson, MD
President

⁴ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *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>.

⁵ Petterson, S., Westfall, J., Miller, B., *Projected Deaths of Despair During the Coronavirus Recession*, Well Being Trust and the Robert Graham Center for Policy Studies in Family Medicine and Primary Care, available at: https://wellbeingtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/WBT_Deaths-of-Despair_COVID-19-FINAL-FINAL.pdf.