April 7, 2004

The Honorable Jerry Moran
U.S. House of Representatives
1519 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-1601

Dear Rep. Moran:

On behalf of the American Hospital Association (AHA), I am writing to express our strong support for your bill, H.R. 4156, which reauthorizes the State 30 Program for five years.

The AHA represents nearly 5,000 member hospitals, health systems, networks and other providers of health care.

The State 30 Program, first enacted in 1996 (Public Law 103-416) and subsequently reauthorized in 2002, has played a crucial role in ensuring that well-qualified physicians are available to provide care in medically underserved areas of our country. During fiscal year 2003, more than 1,000 physicians participated in the program, bringing needed health care services to underserved areas in 49 states. In many areas of the country, the State 30 physician is the only source of health care.

Your bill reauthorizes and improves the current program by providing added state flexibility, enabling states to place physicians in communities where the need is greatest. In addition, the legislation clarifies existing law to ensure that State 30 physician waivers are exempt from the current H-1B visa cap, clearing any ambiguity that now exists in the application of the program.

Access to health care is a critical issue for our nation. Currently, more than 20 million Americans live in areas where there is a lack of physicians to meet their medical needs. Our nation's rural hospitals struggle to recruit and retain physicians, and the supply of primary care providers in rural areas is steadily decreasing. H.R. 4156 reauthorizes and improves the State 30 Program and will help ensure that the health care needs of our communities are met in the years to come.

Once again, the AHA strongly supports H.R. 4156 and stands ready to work with you and your colleagues to reauthorize the State 30 Program.

Sincerely,

Rick Pollack
Executive Vice President