

**American Hospital Association
National Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems
National Rural Health Association**

April 28, 2004

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of the American Hospital Association (AHA), the National Rural Health Association (NRHA), and the National Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems (NAPH), we want to make you aware of a critical issue to your hospitals and ask that the Congress direct the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to relax the recent restrictions imposed on the J-1 physician visa waiver program.

The AHA represents nearly 5,000 hospitals, health care systems, networks and other providers of care. The NRHA represents more than 6000 individual and organizational members who share a common interest in rural health. The NAPH represents more than 100 metropolitan area hospitals and health systems that are key providers of care to low-income and uninsured patients throughout the United States.

In December 2002, HHS announced its participation as an “interested government agency” to fill the void and process J-1 physician visa waiver requests that remained unprocessed when the U.S. Department of Agriculture dropped out of the program.

HHS’ participation in the J-1 visa waiver program has enabled many rural and inner-city communities to continue to have access to qualified primary care physicians.

Last December, HHS announced a revision in the criteria for its J-1 physician visa waiver program. The new criteria exclude review of waiver applications from hospitals. In addition, the new criteria set an exceptionally high physician shortage standard on areas that otherwise qualify for the program. **These changes preclude hospitals and hospital-based health clinics in shortage areas from participating in the J-1 visa waiver program for primary care physicians.**

We urgently need your help in persuading HHS to modify its recently imposed criteria so that restrictions on needy communities in Health Professional Shortage Areas are lifted and hospitals and hospital-based clinics can participate in this vital program.

AHA, NRHA, and NAPH stand ready to work with you to ensure that the health care needs of Americans are met through this valuable program.

Sincerely,

Rick Pollack
Executive Vice President
American Hospital Association

David Sniff
President
National Rural Health Association

Larry S. Gage
President
National Association of Public Hospitals
and Health Systems