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August 18, 2006

The Honorable Arlen Specter
Chairman
Senate Judiciary Committee
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-6275

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member
Senate Judiciary Committee
152 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Specter:

Dear Senator Leahy:

I am writing on behalf of the American Hospital Association (AHA) to express our strong support for the reauthorization of the Conrad State 30 Program.

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

Under current law, foreign physicians admitted to the United States on a J-1 visa to participate in educational exchange programs are required by section 212 (e) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1182) (e) to return to their home country or last permanent residence for two years before they are eligible to apply for an immigrant visa, permanent residence or another nonimmigrant visa.

The Conrad State 30 Program allows state health departments to request J-1 visa waivers for up to 30 foreign physicians per year to work in federally designated Health Professions Shortage Areas or Medically Underserved Areas. First enacted in 1994 (Public Law 103-416), this program has been integral to bringing medical care to many of the most underserved rural areas of the country.

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. In many areas of our nation, the Conrad State 30 physician is the only source of health care.

Unfortunately, the authorization for the Conrad State 30 Program expired on June 1, 2006. Without an immediate reauthorization, many of our communities that have



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benefited from a Conrad State 30 physician may find themselves without access to medical services.

Once again, the AHA urges a swift reauthorization to this valuable program. We stand ready to work with you and your colleagues to accomplish this goal.

Sincerely,

Rick Pollack
Executive Vice President