

December 13, 2019

The Honorable Richard J. Durbin
United States Senate
711 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Durbin,

On behalf of our nearly 5,000 member hospitals, health systems and other health care organizations, our clinician partners – including more than 270,000 affiliated physicians, 2 million nurses, including 9,800 nurse leaders and other caregivers – and the 43,000 health care leaders who belong to our professional membership groups, the American Hospital Association (AHA) and the American Organization for Nursing Leadership (AONL) is writing to strongly support the “Resolving Extended Limbo for Immigrant Employees and Families” (RELIEF) Act, S. 2603.

Currently, there is greater demand for new nurses than there are students graduating from nursing programs in the United States. That is why America’s hospitals and health systems partially rely on immigrant nurses from a number of countries as a small, but absolutely necessary, part of the health care labor market. These nurses are required to meet rigid standards of equivalent education, English fluency and state licensure, and must have clean disciplinary records. Foreign-trained nurses do not displace American workers; in fact, the demand for nurses continues to grow. Foreign-trained nurses make up less than 10% of the 160,000 new nurses licensed each year. They are recruited primarily to rural and inner-city hospitals, locations that find it more difficult to recruit nurses domestically. Foreign-trained nurses serve a critical role in providing care to patients in these underserved communities.

Your legislation would increase the number of employment based visas by eliminating the family and employment green card backlog over five years in the order in which applications were filed. In addition, S. 2603 would treat children and spouses of lawful permanent residents as immediate relatives, just as they are considered when their family members become citizens. The Senate did exactly this in S. 744, the comprehensive immigration reform bill, which passed the Senate in 2013 on a strong bipartisan vote.

We thank you for your understanding of the critical care foreign-trained health care workers provide to Americans across the country and look forward to working with you to advance this legislation.

Sincerely,

/s/

Thomas P. Nickels
Executive Vice President
American Hospital Association

Robyn Begley
Chief Executive Officer, AONL
Senior Vice President, Chief Nursing Officer, AHA