

Durbin, Cramer Introduce Bipartisan Bill Addressing Shortage Of Doctors, Nurses

November 3 2023 1:11 PM



WASHINGTON – U.S. Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL), Chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, along with U.S. Senator Kevin Cramer (R-ND), today introduced bipartisan legislation to quickly address our nation’s shortage of doctors and nurses. The *Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act* would recapture 25,000 unused immigrant visas for nurses and 15,000 unused immigrant visas for physicians that Congress has previously authorized—providing a desperately needed boost to our health care system

in rural and urban areas. U.S. Representative Brad Schneider (D-IL-10) will introduce companion legislation today in the House of Representatives.

“Over the years and during the COVID-19 pandemic, immigrant nurses and doctors have played a vital role in our health care system, and their contributions have undoubtedly saved countless lives,” Durbin said. “It is unacceptable that thousands of trained, highly qualified doctors currently working in the U.S. on temporary visas are stuck in the green card backlog, putting their futures in jeopardy and limiting their ability to contribute to our health care shortages across the country. This bipartisan bill strengthens our health care workforce and I thank my colleague, Senator Cramer, for joining me in introducing this bill.”

“In rural states like North Dakota, highly skilled immigrant doctors and nurses play a critical role in our healthcare workforce, sometimes providing the only specialty care available in the area,” said Cramer. “It’s long-past time our policies reflected a skills-based approach, welcoming hard-working immigrants who help fill the labor and service gaps in the U.S.”

“Smart, targeted reforms remain a cornerstone of the overarching effort to ensure every American, especially those in rural and underserved communities, can see a physician and access high quality care. To that end, the American Medical Association enthusiastically supports *The Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act*. Recapturing up to 15,000 unused employment-based physician immigrant visas over a three-year period is a common-sense approach to addressing the physician shortage as well as diversifying the workforce. The AMA appreciates that the legislation would exempt unused visas from the traditional per country cap, permits family members of the physician recipient to also receive unused visas, and requires physician practices to attest that these visa recipients will not displace any U.S. physicians. Sens. Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Kevin Cramer (R-ND), as well as Reps. Brad Schneider (D-IL), Tom Cole (R-OK), Don Bacon (R-NE), and Yadira Caraveo, M.D. (D-CO), commendably propose maneuvering policy levers within the existing program so their constituents will continue to be able to access care,” said American Medical Association President Jesse M. Ehrenfeld, M.D., MPH.

“We thank Senators Cramer and Durbin for reintroducing the Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act, which comes at a critical time for nursing homes and other long term care facilities. As we face a growing elderly population yet a shortage of health care workers, creating more opportunities for international nurses to immigrate to the U.S. will help strengthen our long term care workforce and protect access to care. These are dedicated nurses who want to serve America’s seniors, and they and their families should be welcomed with open arms,” said Clif Porter, Senior Vice President of Government Relations at the American Health Care Association/National Center for Assisted Living (AHCA/NCAL).

“The American Hospital Association thanks Senators Durbin and Cramer for leading this important bipartisan effort to support hospitals facing workforce pressures and ensure they can continue to provide vital access to care for patients,” said AHA Executive Vice President Stacey Hughes. “By recapturing previously issued but unused immigrant visas and expediting the visa authorization process for highly trained nurses and physicians, today’s legislation will help advance health in communities across the country.”

Specifically, the *Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act*:

- Allows for the “recapture” of green cards that were authorized by Congress but unused in previous years, allotting up to 25,000 immigrant visas for nurses and up to 15,000 immigrant visas for physicians, as well as recaptured visas for immediate family members of such individuals;
- Requires employers to attest that immigrants from overseas who receive these visas will not displace an American worker;
- Requires eligible immigrant medical professionals to meet licensing requirements, pay filing fees, and clear rigorous national security and criminal history background checks before they can receive recaptured green cards.

Our nation has long faced health care workforce shortages, and the COVID-19 pandemic brought these challenges to [crisis levels](#). One in five health care workers [left medicine](#) during the [pandemic](#). The American Hospital Association (AHA) recently called the current hospital workforce shortage a “[national emergency](#).” According to the AHA, 610,388 nurses [reported](#) an intent to leave the nursing field by 2027. Similarly, the Association of American Medical Colleges [estimates](#) that the United States could see a shortage of up to 124,000 physicians by 2034. These shortages tend to [hit rural and medically underserved areas](#) the hardest.

In addition to Durbin and Cramer, the bill is cosponsored by U.S. Senators Cory Booker (D-NJ), Susan Collins (R-ME), Tom Carper (D-DE), Joni Ernst (R-IA), Chris Coons (D-DE), Mike Rounds (R-SD), Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), John Thune (R-SD), Alex Padilla (D-CA), Thom Tillis (R-NC), Kyrsten Sinema (I-AZ), Roger Wicker (R-MS), Ron Wyden (D-OR), and Todd Young (R-IN).

The *Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act* is supported by dozens of organizations including American Academy of Family Physicians; American Academy of Pediatrics; American Academy of Neurology; American Association of International Healthcare Recruitment; American College of Physicians; American Health Care Association; American Hospital Association; American Organization for Nursing Leadership; American Immigration Lawyers Association; American Medical Association; FWD.us; Healthcare Leadership Council; Illinois Health and Hospital Association; Physicians for

American Healthcare Access; National Kidney Foundation; National Immigration Forum; National Rural Health Association; and the Society of Critical Care Medicine.

Full text of the bill is available [here](#).