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April 15, 2020

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The Honorable Amy Klobuchar
425 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Brad Schneider
1432 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Klobuchar and Representative Schneider:

Thank you for your commitment to those with mental health and substance abuse disorders around prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery. On behalf of the American Psychiatric Association (APA), the national medical specialty association representing over 38,800 psychiatric physicians, I write in support of S. 948 and H.R. 2895, the Conrad State 30 and Physician Access Reauthorization Act, which would help address the shortage of psychiatrists in health professional shortage areas by reauthorizing the Conrad State 30 J-1 visa waiver program through FY 2021, among other notable provisions.

The ongoing public health crisis concerning COVID-19 highlights the need for robust investments to address the nation's critical psychiatrist workforce shortage in addition to the current and projected overall physician workforce shortage. According to recent data¹ from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, of the 47.6 million adults with a mental illness, only 43.3% of them received any form of mental health care in the past year, while only 11.1% of the people aged 12 or older who required substance use treatment received it at a facility specializing in addiction medicine.

A persistent shortage of psychiatrists and other mental health professionals contributes to the access problem in many areas, particularly rural areas. According to the Health Resources and Services Administration², while by 2030 the supply of adult psychiatrists is expected to decrease by 20%, the demand for their services is expected to increase by 3%, leaving a shortage of over 12,000 fully-trained psychiatrists. International medical graduates (IMGs) are a critical means to help fill this gap, as approximately 30% of active psychiatrists³ are IMGs.

¹SAMHSA, "Key Substance Use and Mental Health Indicators in the United States: Results from the 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health", available at: <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/cbhsq-reports/NSDUHNationalFindingsReport2018/NSDUHNationalFindingsReport2018.pdf> (August 2019).

²HRSA, "Behavioral Health Workforce Projections: 2017-2030", available at: <https://bh.w.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/bhw/nchwa/projections/bh-workforce-projections-fact-sheet.pdf>.

³ American Association of Medical Colleges, "Active Physicians Who Are International Medical Graduates (IMGs) by Specialty, 2017", available at: <https://www.aamc.org/data-reports/workforce/interactive-data/active-physicians-who-are-international-medical-graduates-imgs-specialty-2017>.

The Conrad State 30 J-1 visa waiver program serves the dual purposes of easing the administrative burdens for certain IMGs while boosting the workforce of physicians in rural and other medically underserved areas. In addition to authorizing this program through FY2021, S. 948 and H.R. 2895 would make several important improvements. These include the provision of additional waivers for states that use at least 90% of their existing waiver capacity, which would allow the program to be more responsive to the needs of patients in states with an especially severe shortage of physicians.

Thank you for your leadership in introducing S. 948 and H.R. 2895. Please let us know how we can aid your efforts to advance this legislation. If you have any questions, please contact Michelle Greenhalgh at mgreenhalgh@psych.org / 202.459.9708.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Saul Levin" followed by "MD, MPA" in smaller letters. The signature is written in a cursive style.

Saul Levin, MD, MPA, FRCP-E, FRCPsych
CEO and Medical Director