September 21, 2015

The Honorable Amy Klobuchar
United States Senate
302 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington DC, 20510

Dear Senator Klobuchar,

On behalf of the American Psychiatric Association (APA), the national medical specialty society representing more than 36,000 physicians specializing in psychiatry, we are writing to support your Conrad State 30 and Physician Access Act (S. 1189), which would help address the shortage of psychiatrists in rural or medically underserved areas by permanently reauthorizing the Conrad State 30 J-1 visa waiver program, among other notable provisions.

Now more than ever, robust investments are needed to address the nation’s critical psychiatric workforce shortage in addition to the current and projected overall physician workforce shortage. As you may know, the Health Resources Services Administration recently found that per capita declines are projected in the field of psychiatry by the year 2025. Subspecialty psychiatry is also facing acute workforce shortages. For example, there are only 8,300 practicing child and adolescent psychiatrists (or one per 38,000 Americans) for a population of children with mental health and substance use needs that has significantly increased in the last decade. The impact of these shortages will be felt by an increasing population of elderly and disabled individuals with psychiatric and substance use disorders as well as those living in underserved rural and inner-city locations.

In addition to permanently reauthorizing the Conrad State 30 J-1 visa waiver program, S. 1189 would make several important improvements. These include the establishment of three additional program waivers per state for academic medical centers, which would create a path for international medical graduates to pursue a career in academic medicine.

Thank you for your leadership on these important matters. We look forward to working with you and the Congress to pass this much needed legislation.

Sincerely,

Renée Binder, M.D.
President

Saul Levin, M.D., M.P.A.
CEO and Medical Director

CC: The Honorable Heidi Heitkamp
The Honorable Jerry Moran
The Honorable Susan Collins