



July 10, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary
US Department of State
600 19th Street, NW
Washington DC 20006

The Honorable Chad Wolf
Acting Secretary
US Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Avenue, SE
Washington DC 20528

Dear Secretary Pompeo and Acting Secretary Wolf:

The American Association for the Study of Liver Disease (AASLD), American College of Gastroenterology, American Gastroenterological Association, and the American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy are deeply concerned about the unintended consequences the *Proclamation Suspending Entry of Aliens Who Present a Risk to the U.S. Labor Market Following the Coronavirus Outbreak* will have on the Health Care Delivery System, workforce, and biomedical research. The proclamation imposes severe limitations on certain non-immigrant visas, including H-1B and J1, through December 31, 2020. As the US-based—but world-leading—four organizations in the critical field of gastroenterology and hepatology, we are concerned these limitations will harm the nation’s health care workforce amid a global pandemic, as well as critically damage our biomedical research enterprise. The primary care clinical and research workforce is experiencing a growing shortage that existed before COVID-19 and will be exacerbated by this policy. Now more than ever, it is critical that we have a strong health care and research workforce. **We urge you to clarify through guidance that all health care professionals and researchers are critical to our national interest, and therefore exempt from the proclamation.**

H-1B and J1 visas are utilized by physicians, medical residents, and postdoctoral researchers each year who work, train, and significantly contribute to biomedical discoveries and health care innovation in the United States. Without these visas, it will be impossible for these key medical professionals to provide essential health care services in our communities and to attract top scientists. This is particularly important for smaller training programs that typically meet the needs of underserved communities, like those disproportionately affected by COVID-19, and are frequently staffed by international medical graduate (IMG) physicians. Non-citizen physicians are essential to ensuring all Americans have access to care. While we recognize that the proclamation makes an exception for health care professionals who are treating COVID-19 patients, or those who are conducting research on COVID-19, it excludes all other medical professionals and researchers who are not directly addressing COVID-19 patients and represents a major gap in the policy. Furthermore, it is not realistic to expect every institution or hospital to submit a request for an exception “in the national interest” for every health care worker or researcher who applies for an H-1B or J1 visa.

Section 3(b)(iv) of the proclamation contains a provision for “any alien whose entry would be in the national interest...” and a statement from the Department of State indicates that mission-critical immigrant visa categories may provide exemptions under the proclamation for certain medical professionals. However, it is our position that every physician and medical researcher is mission-critical – especially at a time when the nation’s health care system is being strained from the impacts of COVID-19. We urge you to establish all health care professionals as “mission-critical”, to include all medical residents and fellows, biomedical researchers, and those working in non-clinical settings, whether they are



involved in COVID-19 research and practice or not. The viability of our nation's health care system is contingent on these professionals being exempt from this proclamation.

To ensure that the U.S. remains a global leader in biomedical research and to ensure that patients have access to the highest quality care when the health care system is strained as never before, we urge the administration to clarify this policy immediately to prevent the loss of talented medical and scientific professionals when our Nation needs them most.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback. Should you need additional information please contact us directly.

Sincerely,

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