



Maryland  
Hospital Association

July 26, 2021

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken  
United States Secretary of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association's 60 member hospitals and health systems, we urge the U.S. Department of State to address the backlog of immigrant visas for eligible foreign-trained nurses by placing registered nurses in the first tier for processing.

The more than 117,000 caregivers in Maryland hospitals have been on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic for 18 months. They answered the call quickly to save lives and care for their communities. The health care field already battles chronic workforce shortages, especially for nurses. The pandemic has simply magnified the problem. There are 133% more open nursing jobs nationwide than a year ago. Similarly, demand for medical surgical travel nurses is 159% higher than before the pandemic and 205% higher for labor and delivery nurses.<sup>1</sup> Many health care workers are leaving jobs in direct care entirely, exacerbating an already dire shortage.

Many Maryland hospitals employ foreign-trained nurses. Those who do not now are looking to hire them to ensure an adequate future supply of health care workers. Foreign-trained nurses play a key role in filling workforce gaps, including traveling nursing jobs, since they must meet equivalent education standards, demonstrate English fluency, maintain a clean disciplinary record, and obtain state licensure. Nurses hired through an agency can agree to work for multiple years at a hospital with the goal of being hired as staff. The health care system cannot afford to reject qualified health professionals, especially nurses.

Yet, processing delays and lack of prioritization cause delays for immigrant visas. This further hinders our member institutions at a time when demand for quality health care is at an all-time high. We urge you to prioritize eligible foreign-trained nurses, who are waiting for visas to enter the U.S. and to care for patients. To our knowledge, the prioritization is not based on a statute or regulation, therefore the State Department has the discretion to make alterations to best serve the American people. We request you exercise this authority to support the health care workforce.

Respectfully,

Nicole Dempsey Stallings  
Chief External Affairs Officer

cc:

Sen. Benjamin L. Cardin

Sen. Christopher Van Hollen, Jr.

Rep. Andrew P. Harris, 1st Congressional District

Rep. C. A. Dutch Ruppersberger III, 2nd Congressional District

Rep. John P. Sarbanes, 3rd Congressional District

Rep. Anthony G. Brown, 4th Congressional District

Rep. Steny H. Hoyer, 5th Congressional District

Rep. David Trone, 6th Congressional District

Rep. Kweisi Mfume, 7th Congressional District

Rep. Jamie B. Raskin, 8th Congressional District

---

<sup>i</sup> Qualivis. (July 12, 2021). “*Nursing Demand.*”