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April 22, 2020

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf
Acting Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
2801 Nebraska Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Pompeo and Acting Secretary Wolf:

I write to urge the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), in coordination with the Department of State (DoS), to address visa concerns that health care practitioners are facing who are not U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents. These individuals are working or trying to work on the frontlines of the current Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

The Trump Administration's announcement of a temporary halt to immigration is the opposite of what is necessary for the health and safety of our country at this time. The United States is desperately in need of health care workers. The existing shortage is only exacerbated by the increased risk that workers face as they provide care for individuals with COVID-19. However, health care professionals who are not U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents and are working or attempting to support our response to the virus are encountering significant administrative roadblocks. The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and DoS must immediately work to expedite the processing of visa petitions of health care professionals and provide them with more flexibility to practice in specialties or locations where they are most needed. The current regulations may force health care workers to suspend providing critical services and leave the country if their visa expires due to terminations or inability to work due to contracting COVID-19 while on the front lines. Additionally, individuals who hold H-1B visas are often unable to practice outside of specialties and locations designated by their sponsor. Each of these regulations prohibit front line workers from serving to their fullest capacity while undergoing increased stress and anxiety in an already unprecedented crisis.

America's health care workers should practice to their highest capacity while feeling secure in their positions. I ask that you immediately address visas restrictions affecting health care workers' nonimmigrant visas. The U.S. must ensure flexibility on where and how they practice and eliminate the risk of visa expirations and unlawful status while serving on the frontlines.

Thank you for your urgent attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Michael F. Bennet". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michael" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Bennet".

U.S. Senator Michael F. Bennet