

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, and Border Safety
“Flatlining Care: Why Immigrants Are Crucial to Bolstering Our Health Care Workforce”
September 14, 2022

Chairman Padilla, Ranking Member Cornyn, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, and Border Safety, thank you for the opportunity to share the perspectives of the American Health Care Association and the National Center for Assisted Living (AHCA/NCAL) regarding immigrants and our health care workforce. AHCA/NCAL represents more than 14,000 skilled nursing facilities (SNF), assisted living (AL) and intellectual and developmental disabilities (ID/DD) communities across the country that provide care to approximately five million people each year.

We appreciate you holding a hearing around this important matter. It is no secret that long-term care (LTC) provider communities, which include SNFs, ALs and ID/DD centers, have been inordinately impacted by the pandemic. While clinical advancements continue to save and improve lives, the workforce challenges these communities face are persistent.

Exacerbated by the pandemic, LTC facilities are facing a historic labor crisis, losing more than 406,000 caregivers since the beginning of the pandemic, and workforce levels are at a 15-year low.¹ SNF and AL communities are facing some of the worst job losses among all health care professions, and the shortage is impacting access to care for our nation’s seniors and individuals with disabilities. Hundreds of LTC centers shuttered across the country, often due to staffing shortages. These closures are devastating to residents, their families, staff and the entire health care system.

AHCA/NCAL has long been supportive of immigrants who make up a vital portion of our nation’s LTC workforce. In fact, approximately 1 in 4 direct care workers were born outside the U.S.² Projections show the country will require an additional 3.5 million long-term care health workers by 2030.³ For these reasons, AHCA/NCAL strongly supports the bipartisan Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act (S. 1024/H.R. 2255) that was specifically noted during the hearing, which would recapture unused visas from previous fiscal years for doctors, nurses, and their families. This legislation allows the entry of nurses with approved immigrant visas and allows physicians with approved immigrant petitions to adjust their status, so that they can help our nation fight COVID-19 and have a durable immigration status.

¹ American Health Care Association (AHCA). (2022). BLS March 2022 jobs report. Retrieved from: <https://www.ahcancal.org/News-and-Communications/Fact-Sheets/FactSheets/BLS-MARCH2022-JOBS-REPORT.pdf>

² Sources: <http://phinational.org/resource/direct-care-worker-disparities-key-trends-and-challenges/>, PHI. “Workforce Data Center.” Last modified September 2, 2021. <https://phinational.org/policy-research/workforce-data-center/>.

³ Institute of Medicine. (2008). *Retooling for an aging America: Building the health care workforce*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

In addition to setting aside these previously unused visas for physician and nurses, S. 1024/H.R. 2255 also would require the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the State Department to expedite the processing of recaptured visas for highly trained nurses. Ensuring an adequate supply of nurses and physicians to help get through the COVID-19 pandemic and rebuild our health care workforce is critical, and we look forward to working with members of Congress to get this legislation signed into law.

It is also important to note that AHCA/NCAL has led and endorsed various efforts to expediate immigrant visa processing to bring health care workers to the U.S. The association has been working closely with national refugee organizations to open career doors for our new neighbors. Moreover, AHCA/NCAL supports common-sense immigration reform that expands opportunities for immigrants to work in the LTC profession.

If you have any questions around our support for the Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act or some of the many workforce efforts AHCA/NCAL is focused on, please contact AHCA's Senior Vice President of Government Relations, Clif Porter, at cporter@ahca.org or NCAL's Executive Director, LaShuan Bethea, at lbethea@ahca.org.