



Charles N. Kahn III
President and CEO

August 24, 2021

Mr. Jeffrey Zients
COVID-19 Response Coordinator and Counselor to the President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Zients:

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, our hospitals face a severe workforce shortage caused in part by the State Department's delayed issuance of immigrant visas to desperately needed foreign trained nurses. On behalf of the Federation of American Hospitals (FAH), I am writing to raise this issue of grave concern affecting our capacity to care for severely ill COVID-19 patients and request your immediate intervention.

The Federation of American Hospitals (FAH) is the national representative of more than 1,000 leading tax-paying hospitals and health systems throughout the United States. FAH members provide patients and communities with access to high-quality, affordable care in both urban and rural areas across 46 states, plus Washington, D.C and Puerto Rico. Our members include teaching, acute, inpatient rehabilitation, behavioral health, and long-term care hospitals and provide a wide range of inpatient, ambulatory, post-acute, emergency, children's, and cancer services.

Since the emergence of COVID-19 in the United States, hospitals across the country have treated millions of Americans infected with the virus. Today, the unrelenting surge in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations due to the Delta variant continue to challenge the resiliency of our health care infrastructure and our caregiver heroes on the frontline. As we look to the future, we face further potential spread of new COVID variants, stagnation in vaccine uptake, breakthrough cases among vaccinated populations, and an unpredictable fall and winter season.

Our hospitals are facing the perfect storm of strain, burnout, and retirement among current health care workers who have been pushed to the brink over the past year and a half. Even prior to the pandemic, the nation has been wrestling with a growing provider shortage,

especially in primary care. These staffing issues have a direct effect on the ability of our hospitals to meet the needs of the patients and communities we serve, especially as COVID-19 patients are occupying a rapidly increasing number of beds. Maintaining an adequate workforce as we defeat this pandemic is perhaps among the greatest challenges our hospitals face today.

The most immediate and commonsense solution to alleviating the health care workforce shortage that hospitals in the U.S. face is to allow highly trained and verified foreign health care professionals to enter the country on immigrant visas. Unfortunately, the Immigrant Visa Prioritization guidance issued by the State Department in April 2021 placed highly trained health care professionals and registered nurses in Tier Four for the visa authorization process for entry into the United States, the lowest priority tier. This is causing severe delays and backlogs for entry among this population.

In July, the FAH submitted a letter to the State Department outlining our dire need for qualified health care workers and expressing our deep concern that the Immigrant Visa Prioritization guidance did not better prioritize visa issuance for health care professionals. We urged the State Department to amend the guidance and direct U.S. embassies and consulates abroad to prioritize issuing visas to foreign trained nurses and asked them to list health care professionals in Tier One of the Department's priority list for processing. This would expedite the timeline under which qualified nurses and other health care professionals could enter the U.S. and begin treating patients at our many sites of care.

To our dismay, we received a less than satisfactory response from the State Department, which failed to recognize the gravity of the workforce shortages our hospitals are facing, and our immediate need for foreign trained nurses to fill our workforce gap and support our hospitals as we respond to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The FAH and our member hospitals strongly urge the White House and the State Department to re-evaluate the Immigrant Visa Prioritization guidance to prioritize highly trained nurses and medical professionals and ensure that registered nurses seeking immigrant visas are in the First Tier of the Department's priority list for processing. This policy change would vastly support our hospitals as they continue to respond to the ongoing COVID-19 public health emergency and better serve the communities in which we operate.

We appreciate your immediate attention to this matter and if you wish to speak further, please do not hesitate to reach out to me or a member of my staff at 202-624-1534.

Sincerely,

