



## **Dems, GOP Move To Give Doctors, Nurses 40K Unused Visas**

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March 29, 2021

U.S. senators on both sides of the aisle introduced legislation that would recapture 40,000 unused immigrant visas for doctors and nurses, a move they say would provide a temporary stopgap to the United States' shortage of health care professionals.

The Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act would provide permanent status for 25,000 foreign nurses, 15,000 foreign doctors and their family members as a means to shore up the nation's COVID-19 health response, according to a Friday statement from the six senators pushing the legislation.

Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., the Senate majority whip and one of the bill's sponsors, explained that one-sixth of U.S. health care workers come from abroad.

"Over the course of this pandemic, immigrant nurses and doctors have played a vital role in our health care system," he said. "It is unacceptable that thousands of doctors currently working in the U.S. on temporary visas are stuck in the green card backlog."

"COVID-19 has exacerbated the shortage of doctors and nurses our nation was already facing," added Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, another sponsor of the bill. "By issuing unused employment-based visas to immigrant medical professionals, this bipartisan legislation would help strengthen our health care workforce and preserve access to care, particularly in rural and underserved communities in Maine and across our country."

Doctors and nurses already in the U.S. on a temporary work permit are geographically bound to the workplace they were cleared to work in. But providing them with permanent status would allow them to move to areas facing more severe health care shortages.

Sens. John Cornyn, R-Texas, Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., Todd Young, R-Ind., and Chris Coons, D-Del., also co-sponsored the bill.

Eligible doctors and nurses would have up to 90 days after the expiration of the COVID-19 national health emergency declaration to apply for the unused visas. Moreover, employers looking to hire the workers must show that they will not displace an American, according to the

senators.

The legislation would further require the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Department of State to expedite the visa processing and direct U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to waive the premium processing fees.

The bill is supported by dozens of organizations, most of which are primarily located within the health sector, as well as a handful of prominent immigration groups, including the American Immigration Lawyers Association.

Lawmakers **first proposed the legislation in May 2020**. The bill had similarly found broad support from both political parties and major health organizations.

Federal immigration law lays out several measures to ensure that immigrant visas don't go unused, including allowing unclaimed visas to roll over to other visa categories at the end of the fiscal year. However, administrative errors have led to thousands of visas going unused and, in effect, disappearing entirely.

In a 2020 report, the Cato Institute estimated that over 220,000 immigrant visas have gone unused since 1992.

Congress has twice authorized the recapture of tens of thousands of immigrant visas that go unused due to administrative error — first through the American Competitiveness in the 21st Century Act in 2000 and the 2005 emergency supplemental appropriations bill.

President Joe Biden recently called for the **recapture of unused employment-based immigrant visas** in the U.S. Citizenship Act, his expansive immigration proposal.