

# STREAMLINE VISA PROCESSES

## THE SOLUTION

Make nursing education programs part of STEM for work authorization and streamline visa and health care immigration processes.



### THE HISTORY

Each year, thousands of internationally trained nurses apply for employment-based visas to come and work in the United States. Because of “continued high demand”, the State Department has experienced significant delays in processing employment-based visas, which has left thousands of nurses waiting for years in foreign countries to have their application reviewed.

As a separate but related issue, in 2008, the Department of Homeland Security announced foreign nationals holding F-1 student visas could extend their stay in the United States by 17 months beyond the expiration of their visas to complete what is considered “optional practical training”—

an internship or job-related to their recently completed field of study—for students who receive degrees in a STEM field.

### THE BIG PICTURE

Nursing is a technically challenging field with a growing labor shortage. According to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing and backed by statistics from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, nearly 200,000 nursing vacancies are projected to occur nationwide every year until 2032. Unfortunately, the labor market is not supplying enough nurses to cover these vacancies; in the years 2020 and 2021, the number of nurses in the workforce shrunk by 100,000.

While it takes years for someone to progress through nursing school and receive training to care for patients, thousands of qualified nurses are available and ready to work today but are delayed and waiting in their home countries for the federal government to process their applications.



# FEDERAL: STREAMLINE VISA PROCESSES CONTINUED ...

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## THE SOLUTION:

Make nursing education programs part of STEM for work authorization and streamline visa and health care immigration processes.

## THE PROBLEM

The visa backlog continues to increase; with the time it takes to process a nurse's application reaching multiple years. Kansas hospitals have signed employment agreements with hundreds of international nurses, but are unable to begin those nurses working in their hospitals without an approved visa.

On the STEM front, a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree does not qualify for DHS's STEM OPT 17-month visa extension program despite its relationship with science and technology. While the Department of Labor and the Department of Veterans Affairs currently recognize nursing as a STEM field, the DHS omits nursing as a STEM field.

Additionally, DHS' profound backlog in processing H-class work visas means many students who receive a high-quality American education and have jobs lined up after graduation are forced to return to their home countries for visa processing.

## A CONGRESSIONAL SOLUTION

Recapture and reallocate thousands of previously issued but unused visas for international nurses and physicians. Pass legislation such as the Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act (H.R. 5283/S. 2759) that would recapture and reallocate thousands of previously issued but unused visas to licensed international nurses and physicians. Congress additionally should increase funding for staffing of the State Department, DHS, and embassies to increase productivity and capacity of processing applications.

Congress should make nursing education programs part of STEM for work authorization by passing a bill that lists Bachelor of Science Nursing degrees in Department of Homeland Security's STEM OPT visa extension program, thus allowing these students to fill much-needed nursing job vacancies here in Kansas and throughout the United States.

## Legislative Contacts



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