



# Northern Border Regional Commission

**August 29, 2022**

**To:**

The Honorable Congresswoman Elise Stefanik  
2211 Rayburn House Office Building  
Independence Avenue South West  
Washington, DC 20515

**From:**

Rich Grogan, Executive Director, Northern Border Regional Commission

**CC:**

Congresswoman Ann Kuster  
Congressman John Katko  
Congresswoman Chellie Pingree  
Congressman Peter Welch  
Chris Saunders, Federal Co-Chair, Northern Border Regional Commission

Dear Congresswoman Stefanik,

Thank you for your recent letter encouraging the Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) to explore the creation of a J-1 visa waiver program as a means to addressing a shortage of qualified physicians in our territory. The Commission appreciates you and your colleagues' interest in ensuring that the rural residents of New York and northern New England have easy and regular access to health care services.

Congress created the NBRC as a federal-state partnership with the intention that the Commission should explore opportunities to leverage the assets of the region to address the common challenges that are found within its member states. While the broader focus of the Commission's programs might be thought of as supporting traditional economic development activities, we conduct our work with an understanding that certain basic conditions need to be in place for any economic development activities to occur. As you note in your letter, many of our communities have struggled to attract and retain physicians and nurses which has led to a reduction or loss of health care access in some areas. If unaddressed, the health care shortages of our region threaten the well-being of residents and the vibrancy of our communities.

While authorized by Congress to support health care related activities, to date the Commission has primarily utilized this authority to make a handful of grant awards to health care facilities within the region. Because the Commission shares your concerns, since this spring it has undertaken intentional work to understand what steps it could take to broaden and deepen our work in the health care arena. This information gathering has included conversations with a wide variety of stakeholders such as health care providers, elected and appointed officials, other federal and state agencies, educational institution providers, as well as our peer Commissions. The feedback we received indicate that there is broad support for the Commission to join other partners in collaborative efforts to address the region's shortage of nurses and qualified physicians.

We are pleased to report to you and your colleagues that the Commission will hire a health care program specialist that will be responsible for this work in FY'23. Our expectation is that among the duties of this new position will be responsibility for forming workforce development partnerships with local and statewide institutions to address shortages across a variety of key healthcare roles and carrying out the steps needed for the Commission to formally stand-up a J-1 visa program.

We believe both of these initiatives will yield significant benefits for the residents of the northern border region and appreciate your support for these efforts. As the Commission undertakes this work, we will be sure to keep you apprised of key steps and milestones.

With best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Grogan', written in a cursive style.

Rich Grogan, Executive Director, Northern Border Regional Commission