

# South Carolina's J-1 Visa Waiver Program 1995 – 2018

*A review of the Conrad 30 J-1 visa waiver program administered  
by the South Carolina Office of Primary Care, South Carolina  
Department of Health and Environmental Control*

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## Overview and History of the Conrad 30 program

The Exchange Visitor visa program (J-1 visas) administered by the U.S. State Department allows individuals from other countries around the world to work and/or study in the United States. More than 300,000 participants from around the world come to the U.S. on J-1 visas every year in a variety of cultural exchange programs.<sup>i</sup> The J-1 visa allows holders to stay in the United States for the duration of their education program and then requires them to return to their home country for two years before seeking approval to re-enter the country.

Among those many J-1 visa holders are physicians who have graduated from a foreign medical school and wish to extend their medical education with more training in the United States. These international medical graduates (often referred to as IMGs) are an important part of the physician workforce in the United States, accounting for 25% of all of the active physicians practicing in the country in 2016.<sup>ii</sup> In South Carolina IMGs made up 15% of the active physician workforce in 2016,<sup>iii</sup> some of whom were US citizens, some in the process of becoming a U.S. citizen, and some in the country on a J-1 visa.

Physicians holding a J-1 visa who would like to remain in the country for additional education or to practice as a physician may apply for a waiver of the 'return home' requirement through the Conrad 30 program. Those waivers allow an IMG physician with a J-1 visa to stay in the U.S. for an additional three years after they complete their residency training if they agree to practice in a federally designated Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) or in a Medically Underserved Area (MUA). The Conrad 30 program came into existence in 1994 as one solution to physician shortages occurring around the country, and especially in our most rural areas. The program allows each state to sponsor up to 30 waivers for IMGs each year.

In South Carolina the Office of Primary Care is responsible for working with J-1 visa holders and their sponsoring agencies or facilities to help them with the process of seeking a waiver. Exact requirements differ from state to state, but all applicants must complete the following requirements:

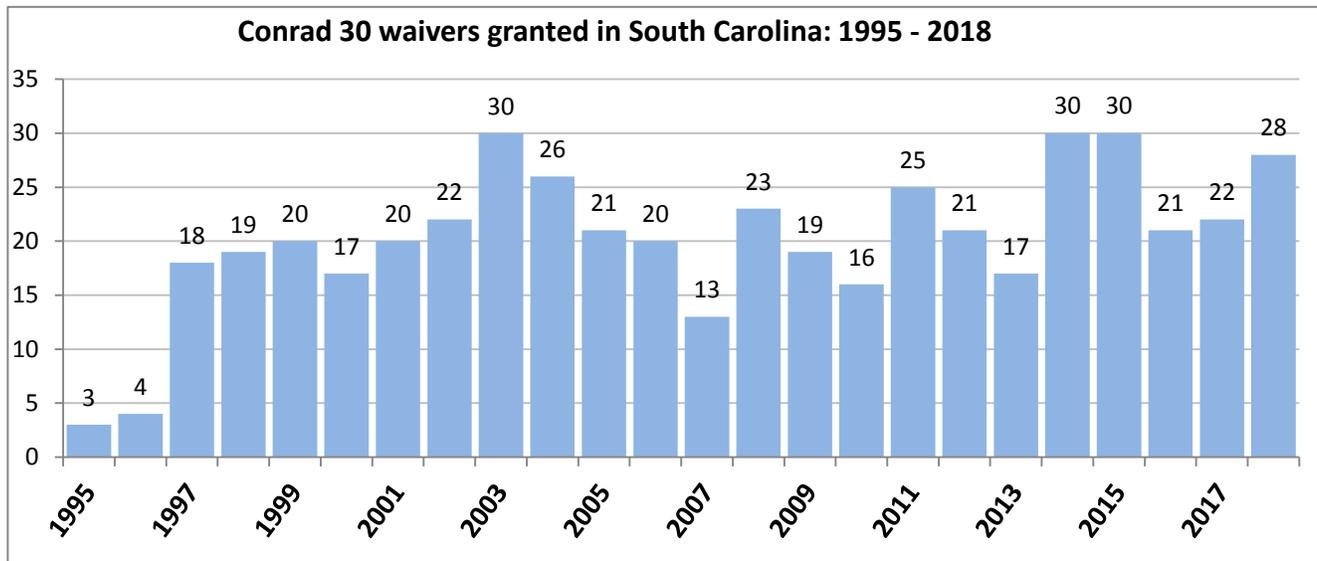
- Have a contract for full time employment as a direct care physician in a HPSA or MUA designated area, or serving medically underserved populations;
- a commitment to begin their employment within 90 days of their waiver request;
- agree to a three year work commitment with their J-1 sponsoring employer under an H-1B temporary worker status;
- have a letter of support from the authorized official sponsoring the physician's waiver request;
- have a "no objection" letter from the foreign physician's home country if his/her exchange was funded by the home government.

South Carolina also requires that all facilities sponsoring a physician for a J-1 waiver request have the following characteristics:

- employing facilities may be publicly funded health care facilities or private entities;
- the facility must currently accept Medicare and Medicaid assignments and have an approved arrangement for treating indigent, uninsured patients
- the facility must have been providing care for a minimum of 12 months in the state of South Carolina prior to submitting its request.

## South Carolina Conrad 30 Program Recipients

Since 1995 a total of 485 physicians have received Conrad 30 waivers in South Carolina as of October, 2018. Those waivers allow them to stay in the state for three years beyond the point allowed by their J-1 Visa status. In the 1990s waivers were limited to a total of 20 per year. That was raised to a total of 30 per year in 2000. The chart below shows the number of waivers granted in South Carolina each year since the program began.



Organization Type	Total Waiver Recipients	
	N	%
Community Health Centers	63	13%
Rural Health Center	33	7%
Hospitals	251	52%
Mental Health Center	8	2%
Mental Health Hospital	17	4%
Private Practice	113	23%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>485</b>	<b>101%</b>
Note: Percentages sum to 101% due to rounding.		

As noted in the program requirements, a variety of facilities can sponsor a Conrad 30 applicant as long as the practice location for that physician is in a designated shortage area, or is serving a disadvantaged population. The organizations in South Carolina that have sponsored waiver recipients over the years are almost equally divided between hospitals and community-based practice settings.

Over the life of the program, Conrad 30 Waivers have brought a wide variety of physicians into South Carolina. The table on the next page summarizes the diversity of clinical specialties that have been made available to communities within the state. Between 1995 and October of 2018, 6.6% of the waivers granted went to mental health providers (n=32), 47.6% to primary care physicians (n=231), and 45.8% went to sub-specialists (n=222).

<b>Clinical Specialties Among Physicians Receiving J-1 Visa Waivers in South Carolina 1995 - 2018</b>		
<b>Specialty</b>	<b>Waiver Recipients</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
Internal Medicine	134	27.6%
Family Practice/Medicine	45	9.3%
Pediatrics	39	8.0%
Psychiatry	32	6.6%
Nephrology	30	6.2%
Cardiology	29	6.0%
Pulmonology	26	5.4%
Neurology	25	5.2%
Endocrinology	16	3.3%
Hematology/Oncology	14	2.9%
Obstetrics/Gynecology	13	2.7%
Anesthesia	10	2.1%
Infectious Disease	10	2.1%
General Surgery	9	1.9%
Gastroenterology	6	1.2%
Neonatology	5	1.0%
Orthopedic Surgery	4	0.8%
Radiology	4	0.8%
Pediatric Endocrinology	3	0.6%
Pediatric Hematology/Oncology	3	0.6%
Pediatric Neurology	3	0.6%
Rheumatology	3	0.6%
Geriatrics	3	0.6%
Pathology	2	0.4%
Pediatric Gastroenterology	2	0.4%
Pediatric Nephrology	2	0.4%
Emergency Medicine	1	0.2%
Genetics	1	0.2%
Internal Medicine Critical Care	1	0.2%
Neurological Surgery	1	0.2%
Ophthalmology	1	0.2%
Organ Transplant Surgeon	1	0.2%
Orthopedic Specialist	1	0.2%
Pediatric Intensive Care	1	0.2%
Pediatric Ophthalmology	1	0.2%
Pediatric Pulmonology	1	0.2%
Physical Medicine	1	0.2%
Vascular Neurology	1	0.2%
Vascular Radiology	1	0.2%
	485	100%

In the early years of the program, the majority of waivers were granted to physicians practicing in rural areas of the state. In the most recent decade, more waivers have been granted to physicians practicing in urban areas. This may be a reflection of the increasing concentration of physicians and healthcare facilities in our urban areas that has taken place in South Carolina over the past two decades.

Time Period	Waiver Recipient Practice Location				Waivers Granted
	Rural		Urban		Total
	#	Row %	#	Row %	#
<b>1995 - 1999</b>	43	67.2%	21	32.8%	64
<b>2000 - 2009</b>	122	57.8%	89	42.2%	211
<b>2010 – early 2018</b>	61	29.0%	149	71.0%	210
	<b>226</b>	<b>46.6%</b>	<b>259</b>	<b>53.4%</b>	<b>485</b>

### Physician Specialties by Sponsoring Organization Type 1995 - 2018

Waiver Physician Specialties in Community Health Centers	Total # Sponsored
Family Practice	19
Pediatrics	16
Internal Medicine	14
Obstetrics/Gynecology	7
Obstetrics	3
Infectious Disease	3
Pathology	1
<b>Total:</b>	<b>63</b>

Waiver Physician Specialties in Rural Health Clinics	Total # Sponsored
Internal Medicine	18
Pediatrics	8
Family Practice	7
<b>Total:</b>	<b>33</b>

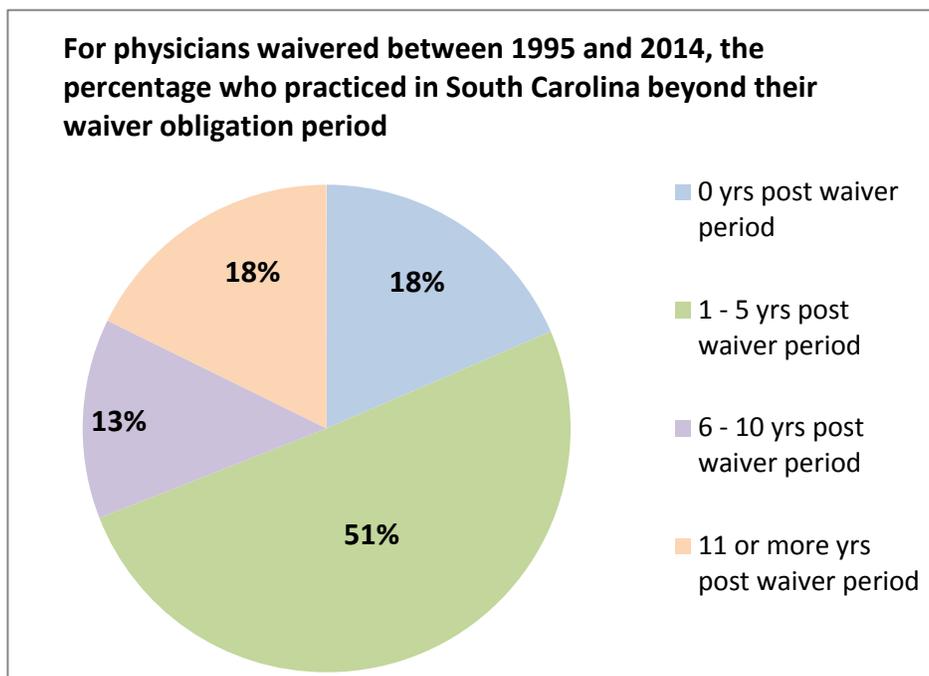
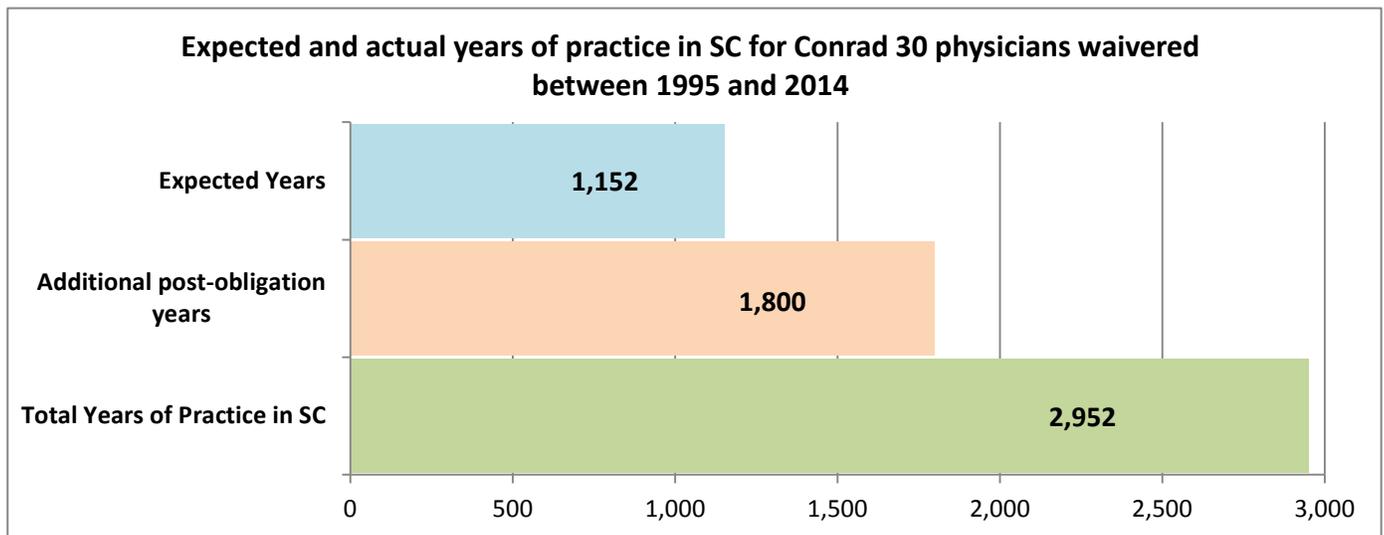
Waiver Physician Specialties in Mental Health Centers and Hospitals	Total # Sponsored
Psychiatry	24
Internal Medicine	1
<b>Total:</b>	<b>25</b>

Waiver Physician Specialties in Private Practices	Total # Sponsored
Cardiology	24
Nephrology	17
Internal Medicine	16
Pulmonology	10
Pediatrics	8
Neurology	7
Endocrinology	7
Infectious Disease	5
Hem/Oncology	4
Psychiatry	3
General Surgeon	3
Family Practice	2
Infectious Disease	2
Genetics	1
Geriatrics	1
Obstetrics	1
Orthopedic Surgeon	1
Pediatrics Hem/Oncology	1
Pediatrics Pulmonology	1
Physical Medicine	1
Total:	113

Waiver Physician Specialties in General Hospitals	Total # Sponsored
Internal Medicine	81
Neurology	18
Family Practice	17
Pulmonology	15
Nephrology	13
Anesthesia	10
Hematology/Oncology	10
Endocrinology	8
Pediatrics	7
Gastroenterology	6
General Surgeon	6
Cardiology	5
Neonatology	5
Psychiatry	5
Radiology	4
Orthopedic Surgeon	3
Pediatrics Endocrinology	3
Pediatrics Neurology	3
Rheumatology	3
Infectious Disease	2
Obstetrics/Gynecology	2
Pediatrics Gastroenterology	2
Pediatrics Hematology/Oncology	2
Pediatrics Nephrology	2
Emergency Medicine	1
Geriatrics	1
Internal Medicine/Critical Care	1
Internal Medicine/Geriatrics	1
Neurological Surgery	1
Ophthalmology	1
Organ Transplant Surgeon	1
Pathology	1
Pediatric Intensive Care	1
Pediatrics Ophthalmology	1
Vascular Neurology	1
Vascular Radiology	1
Total:	251

## Retention of Conrad 30 Waiver Recipients in South Carolina

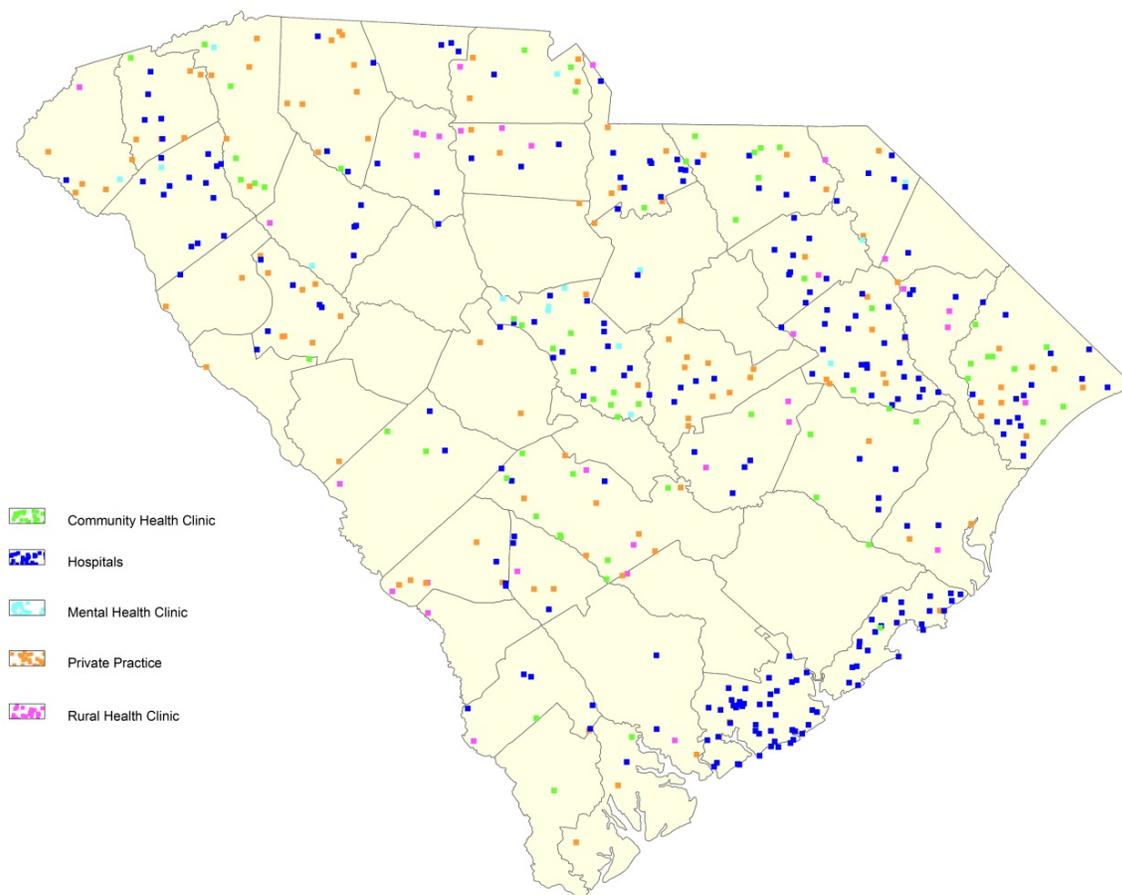
Waiver recipients are expected to serve out a three year term for the organizations that sponsor them. **The following charts and calculations, based on the 384 physicians who received waivers in South Carolina between 1995 and 2014, examine the extent to which these physicians remained in practice in the state beyond the obligation imposed by the Conrad 30 program.** (Those waived in 2016, 2017, and 2018 are still within their initial practice obligation period of 3 years.) Collectively, they were expected to provide a total of 1,152 years of practice in the state. However, most of those physicians stayed beyond that initial obligation period and provided 1,800 additional years of practice. Taken altogether, the 384 J-1 visa waiver recipients who received their waivers between 1995 and 2014 have practiced in South Carolina for a total of 2,952 years.



The majority (81.5%) of physicians receiving a J-1 visa waiver in South Carolina between 1995 and 2014 remained in practice in the state beyond the original obligation period of 3 years. The pie chart to the left reveals that half of them (51%) stayed for 1 to 5 years beyond their obligation period, and that 18% remained in practice in our state for 11 years or more beyond their initial obligation.

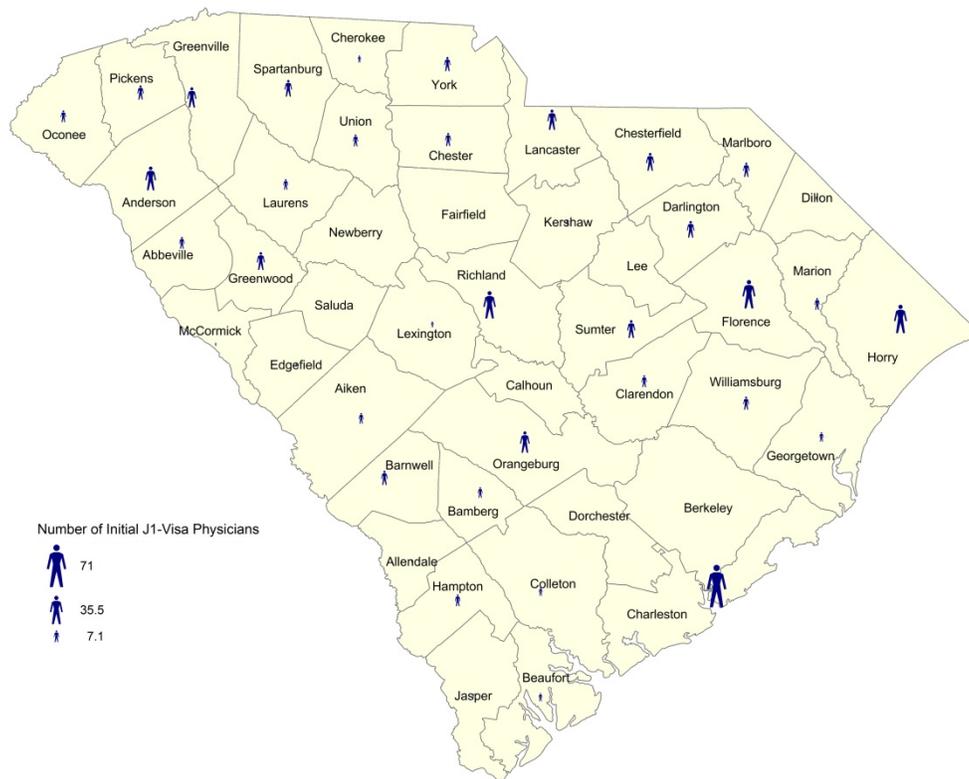
The average number of years these physicians stayed to practice in South Carolina beyond their initial obligation period was 4.7 years.

## Map 1. Conrad 30 Visa Waiver Recipients 1995 – 2018 by Employing Organization Type and County Location



This map shows the county location of each of the Conrad 30 waiver recipients at the time of their waiver application and the type of organization that sponsored their waiver application. Dots within the county boundaries are randomly placed. The different colors in the map correspond to the type of sponsoring organization: hospitals, rural health clinics, mental health hospitals and community-based centers, community health clinics, and private practices. This map includes the 485 physicians that received Conrad 30 J-1 visa waivers from 1995 through October 2018.

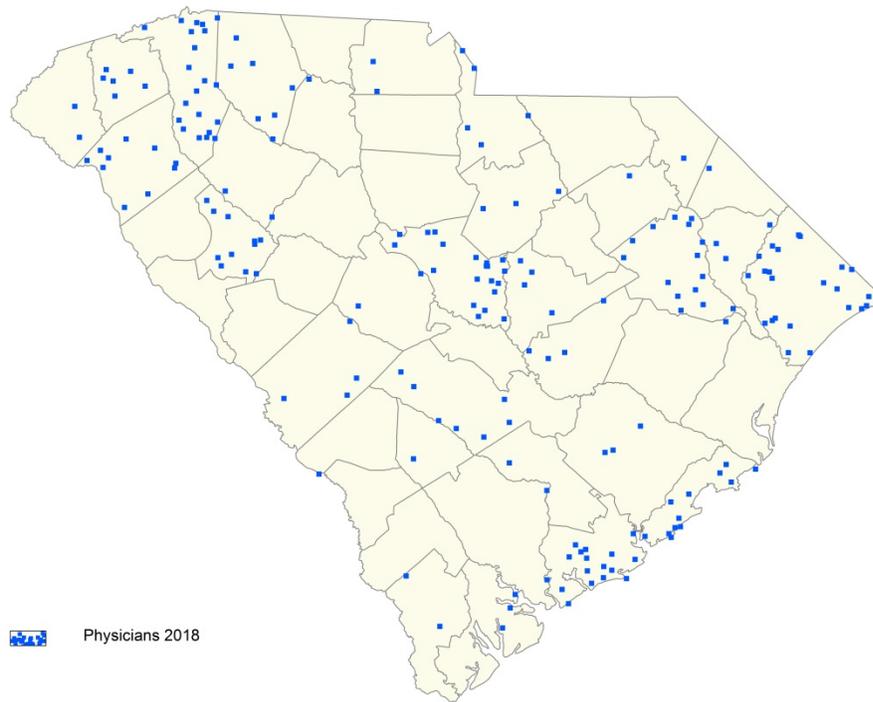
## Map 2. Relative Concentration of J-1 Visa Waiver Recipients by County, 1995 - 2018



The map and table show the number of Conrad 30 waiver recipients in each county, based on their practice location at the time of their original waiver application. If a county is not included in the table below it has had no Conrad 30 recipient as of October, 2018.

County	Waiver Recipients	County	Waiver Recipients	County	Waiver Recipients
Abbeville	7	Dillon	1	Marion	7
Aiken	6	Edgefield	1	Marlboro	11
Allendale	1	Florence	36	McCormick	1
Anderson	26	Georgetown	5	Oconee	8
Bamberg	6	Greenville	19	Orangeburg	22
Barnwell	11	Greenwood	15	Pickens	11
Beaufort	4	Greer	1	Richland	33
Charleston	71	Hampton	8	Spartanburg	14
Cherokee	3	Horry	36	Sumter	15
Chester	9	Jasper	1	Union	7
Chesterfield	15	Kershaw	2	Williamsburg	9
Clarendon	8	Lancaster	20	York	10
Colleton	4	Laurens	6		
Darlington	13	Lexington	2	<b>Total:</b>	<b>485</b>

**Map 3. All Conrad 30 Waiver Recipients Actively Practicing in South Carolina in 2018**



**J-1 Visa Waiver Recipients 1995 – 2018 Actively Practicing in South Carolina in 2018 by Practice County**

County	Practicing in 2018	County	Practicing in 2018	County	Practicing in 2018
Abbeville	2	Dillon	0	McCormick	1
Aiken	4	Dorchester	0	Marion	4
Allendale	0	Edgefield	0	Marlboro	3
Anderson	12	Fairfield	0	Newberry	0
Bamberg	2	Florence	13	Oconee	5
Barnwell	2	Georgetown	1	Orangeburg	8
Beaufort	1	Greenville	10	Pickens	4
Berkeley	0	Greenwood	9	Richland	16
Calhoun	0	Hampton	3	Saluda	0
Charleston	28	Horry	19	Spartanburg	11
Cherokee	0	Jasper	1	Sumter	8
Chester	1	Kershaw	1	Union	1
Chesterfield	5	Lancaster	5	Williamsburg	3
Clarendon	4	Laurens	2	York	3
Colleton	1	Lee	0		
Darlington	4	Lexington	0	<b>Total:</b>	<b>197</b>

## References

- <sup>i</sup> J-1 Visa Fact Sheet. Accessed at <https://j1visa.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/J1Visa-fact-sheet-2018.pdf>
- <sup>ii</sup> Association of the American Medical Colleges. (2017) 2017 State Physician Workforce Data Report. Washington, D.C. Accessed at <https://members.aamc.org/eweb/upload/2017%20State%20Physician%20Workforce%20Data%20Report.pdf>
- <sup>iii</sup> Ibid.

## Recommended reading:

Patterson, DG, Keppel G. Skillman SM. Conrad 30 Waivers for Physicians on J-1 Visas: State Policies, Practices, and Perspectives. Final Report #157. Seattle, WA: WWAMI Rural Health Research Center, University of Washington. March 2016.