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**The Lewiston Tribune**  
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**by William L. Spence**  
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## Idaho bill to expand visa waiver program advances

BOISE — Legislation that could help Gritman Medical Center in Moscow and other Idaho hospitals hire specialists and primary care physicians advanced to the House floor with a favorable recommendation Thursday.

The bill, sponsored by Rep. Caroline Troy, R-Genesee, would expand an existing program so a greater variety of foreign-trained doctors could apply for visa waivers.

The J-1 visa waiver program was established in 2004. It allows qualified Idaho health care organizations to apply for as many as 30 visa waivers per year from the U.S. Department of State, so they can hire foreign-trained doctors to serve in federally designated physician shortage areas.

The doctors would have to be licensed by the Idaho Board of Medicine, agree to serve a minimum of three years in the qualifying location and serve Medicaid/Medicare, low-income and uninsured patients.

The program is currently open to pediatrics, family and internal medicine, obstetrics, gynecology, general surgery and psychiatry. Troy's bill would expand that to include sub-specialties, such as oncologists. It also lets health care facilities that aren't in federally designated shortage areas to apply for some of the waivers, subject to certain restrictions.

"We feel this balances the need for primary care physicians with the growing need for specialists," Troy told the House Health and Welfare Committee Thursday. "The bottom line is, Idaho needs more doctors."

The measure is supported by the Idaho Hospital Association and Idaho Medical Association. The Health and Welfare Committee gave it a favorable recommendation; it now goes to the full House for a vote.

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