



Ms. Weinstock

## Visa Quotas for Physical Therapists and Nurses Filled

*Phil Bolton for GlobalAtlanta*

This year's quotas for immigration visas for nurses and physical therapists who wish to immigrate to the **United States** has been filled and new openings are not expected for a year or more, **Karen Weinstock**, an **Atlanta**-based immigration attorney with the national law firm **Siskind Susser Bland**, told **GlobalAtlanta**.

"For **Americans**, the news could not come at a worse time," she said. "The health care industry is experiencing a critical shortage of nurses. Many estimate that the shortage will grow to as large as a million nurses in the next decade."

She said that she is advising hospitals and employers wishing to file temporary visa applications for nurses who already are in the U.S. should do so by Tuesday, Oct. 31. By doing so, she said, they can file the immigrant visa application at the same time as the permanent residency "green card" application, which allows a nurse to work temporarily until the final application is processed.

According to Ms. Weinstock, the **U.S. State Department** issued a bulletin that will become effective Nov. 1 stating that immigrant visa numbers for nurses and their employers will retrogress back to October 2005, resulting in a one- to two-year wait for nurses and hospitals wishing to employ them.

"That is because there is much more demand for these immigrant visas than what **Congress** allotted," she said. "These annual caps on immigration visas were determined a long time ago in the 1960s and have traditionally lagged behind the robust requirements of the U.S. economy."

Ms. Weinstock also said that nurses are generally only able to come to the U.S. on green cards since most are ineligible for non-immigrant visas. She added that the majority of nurses entering the U.S. from outside **North America** are coming from the **Philippines** and **India**.

A prominent exception exists for nurses from **Canada** and **Mexico** under **Nafta**, but even they, she said, only can get temporary one-year visas and will not be able to qualify immediately for permanent residency.

Ms. Weinstock said that the **U.S. Senate** passed its version of a comprehensive immigration reform earlier this year that included relief for immigrant visa numbers for nurses. The **House of Representatives**, however, failed to pass the legislation.

"We urge hospitals and employers to contact their Congressional representatives in order to provide legislative relief to the crisis by increasing the annual cap for nurses," she added.

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