CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE
COST ESTIMATE

October 20, 2004

S. 2302

An act to improve access to physicians in medically underserved areas

As passed by the Senate on October 11, 2004

CBO estimates that implementing S. 2302 would result in no significant net cost to the federal government. The act would affect direct spending, but we estimate that any effects would be insignificant. S. 2302 contains no intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act and would impose no costs on state, local, or tribal governments.

Until June 1, 2004, foreign students attending medical school in the United States were permitted to remain here after graduation if they agreed to work for at least three years in certain regions considered to be underserved by physicians or if they accepted employment with certain federal agencies. That program was limited to 30 individuals a year for each state that participated in the program. Under current law, such individuals must return to their native countries. S. 2302 would make several changes to that program and would reestablish it through June 1, 2006.

Based on the participation of foreign medical students in those employment programs in recent years, CBO expects that the act's provisions would affect no more than 2,000 persons annually. The Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS) would collect fees to provide work permits for those individuals. CIS fees are classified as offsetting receipts (a credit against direct spending). The agency is authorized to spend such fees without further appropriation, so the net impact on CIS spending would be insignificant.

On October 15, 2004, CBO transmitted a cost estimate for H.R. 4453, the Access to Rural Physicians Improvement Act of 2004, as passed by the House of Representatives on October 6, 2004. The two acts are similar and the cost estimates are identical.

The CBO staff contact for this estimate is Mark Grabowicz. This estimate was approved by Robert A. Sunshine, Assistant Director for Budget Analysis.