

April 14, 2020

Kenneth Cuccinelli
Acting Director
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
20 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20529

Dear Acting Director Cuccinelli:

On behalf of the physician and medical student members of the American Medical Association (AMA), I am writing to again urge the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to temporarily extend visas automatically for one year and expedite approvals of extensions and changes of status for non-U.S. citizen international medical graduates (IMGs) practicing, or otherwise lawfully present, in the U.S. **We strongly believe that the COVID-19 pandemic the entire world is currently facing should be recognized by USCIS as an extraordinary circumstance beyond the control of the non-U.S. citizen IMG applicant or their employer.** The heightened demands currently placed upon physicians and their employers coupled with the difficulties their attorneys are facing in properly filing the necessary and often lengthy paperwork, and which cannot always be achieved completely online, makes renewal or request for a status change virtually impossible to accomplish during this time, especially with USCIS closing most of its facilities and stay at home and shelter in place orders in effect.

In addition, the AMA urges the Administration to extend the current 60-day maximum grace period to a 180-day grace period to allow any non-U.S. citizen IMG who has been furloughed or laid-off as a result of the pandemic to remain in the U.S. and find new employment. We also urge the Administration to protect the spouses and dependent children of our H-1B physicians by automatically granting a one-year extension of their H-4 visas so that the families of our practitioners, that are here working to better U.S. patients' lives, are not separated during the pandemic.

As you well know, non-U.S. citizen IMGs play a critical role in providing health care to many Americans, especially in areas of the country with higher rates of poverty and chronic disease. Nearly 21 million people live in areas of the U.S. where foreign-trained physicians account for at least half of all physicians.¹ Moreover, approximately one quarter of non-U.S. IMGs training in the U.S. do so on H-1B visas.² Individuals with serious chronic medical conditions, including diabetes, are at a higher risk of experiencing serious complications from COVID-19.³ Research shows that certain states and employers rely heavily on H-1B visa physicians to provide health care services to their U.S. patients, and especially

¹ <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/foreign-trained-doctors-are-critical-to-serving-many-us-communities.pdf>.

² <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Graduate-Medical-Education%2C-2017-2018.-Brotherton-Etzel/f22fe6ec8b17aa79ae8ab849ae5838563a14a676>.

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html>.

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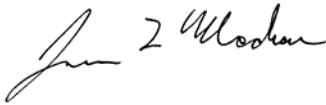
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those patients with chronic conditions. Many of those very same states (New York, California, Michigan, Illinois, and Massachusetts) are also the ones that have been the most significantly impacted, thus far, by the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴

We urge the Administration to act promptly and institute the recommendations outlined above, as our non-U.S. citizen IMGs need to be able to immediately use their knowledge and training to save lives during this unprecedented time in history without fear of the loss of their, or their dependents', immigration statuses.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James L. Madara". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "M".

James L. Madara, MD

⁴ Kahn, P. and Gardin, T., *Distribution of Physicians With H-1B Visas By State and Sponsoring Employer*, JAMA Network Open, 2017. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5815043/>