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July 25, 2019

G. Kevin Saba
Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for
Private Sector Exchange Designation
U.S. Department of State
Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs
Private Sector Exchange, SA-4E
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Ken Cuccinelli
Acting Director
Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
20 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20529-2140

William W. Pinsky, MD, FAAP, FACC
President and Chief Executive Officer
Educational Commission for Foreign
Medical Graduates (ECFMG)
3624 Market Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Dear Mr. Saba, Director Cuccinelli, and Dr. Pinsky:

On behalf of the physician and medical student members of the American Medical Association (AMA), I am writing to urge the U.S. Department of State (DoS), the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), and Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG) to waive the “grace-period” requirement under the J-1 physician visa program for residents and fellows impacted by the bankruptcy filing and pending closure of Hahnemann University Hospital.

As you know, on June 30, 2019, Hahnemann University Hospital, the primary teaching hospital affiliated with Drexel University College of Medicine in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy and announced it would be permanently closing by September 2019. Hahnemann is a 496-bed teaching hospital in center city Philadelphia where 571 medical residents and fellows, as well as about a third of Drexel medical students, received training. The Hahnemann closure marks what may be the largest displacement of medical residents in a single event ever, even more than the number of residents displaced from Charity Hospital in New Orleans, Louisiana, after Hurricane Katrina.

ECFMG is the sole J-1 visa sponsor of foreign national physicians to participate in graduate medical education (GME) at U.S. hospitals. It is our understanding that there are approximately 59, J-1 visa-holding residents who were in training at Hahnemann and who, if they do not find a position with another GME training program within 30 days of the hospital closing, will have to leave the U.S. Specifically, it is our understanding that there is a grace period that USCIS allows for individuals upon completion of the J-1 Exchange Program before they must depart the U.S. The 30-days following the completion of a residents’ J-1 program as indicated on their DS-2019 form is considered the grace period. Upon the end of the 30-days, a J-1 resident will no longer fall under J-1 status, but instead they will fall under the overall

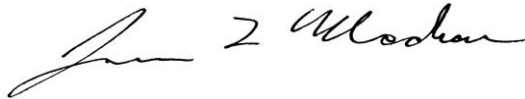
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jurisdiction of the USCIS and be deported. In addition, it is our understanding that a J-1 resident may not continue to work on any exchange activities during the grace period. We understand that generally extensions and requests for additional time are only given under remarkable and exceptional situations. We believe that the Hahnemann closure falls squarely within the constraints of a “remarkable and exceptional situation.” These 59, J-1 visa-holding residents are being impacted by the abrupt termination of their training programs due to no fault of their own, but by the unfortunate closure of Hahnemann. The Hahnemann closure coupled with the 30-day grace period are causing an exceptional amount of stress on these residents, and especially for those trying to find alternate training in specialties.

We strongly urge the DoS to work with the USCIS and ECFMG to ensure that the 30-day grace period requirement for these J-1 visa holding residents, impacted by the bankruptcy filing and pending closure of Hahnemann University Hospital, are waived and priority is given to ensuring these J-1 visa residents have the support they need to find an appropriate alternative training program. Also, we urge the DoS, USCIS, and ECFMG to afford these residents flexibility for this unusual situation and waive requirements such as, the 30-day grace period and any others that may unintentionally hinder a J-1 resident’s ability to find an appropriate position with another GME training program and continue their education in the Exchange Visitor Program.

The AMA appreciates the consideration of our urgent request. If you have any questions, please contact Margaret Garikes, Vice President for Federal Affairs, at margaret.garikes@ama-assn.org, or by calling 202-789-7409.

Sincerely,

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

James L. Madara, MD

cc: Diane Culkin, Division Chief
Department of State, Private Sector Exchange