

March 24, 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 strongly urge the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to temporarily expedite extensions and changes of status for foreign national doctors currently in the U.S. The health care workforce includes a significant number of physicians and medical residents who are practicing or otherwise lawfully present in the U.S. on a visa or other protected status. These providers, who are often at academic medical centers and safety-net facilities on the front line of the COVID-19 pandemic, are crucial components of our health care workforce.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. was already facing a serious shortage of physicians largely due to the growth and aging of the population and the impending retirements of many physicians.<sup>1</sup> Non-U.S. citizen international medical graduates (IMG) help 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.<sup>2</sup> Individuals with serious chronic medical conditions, including diabetes, are at a higher risk of experiencing serious complications from COVID-19.<sup>3</sup> Our non-U.S. citizen IMGs play a vital role in caring for those seriously ill from COVID-19. Therefore, we urge USCIS to temporarily extend visas and expedite approvals of extensions and changes of status for physicians and medical residents practicing, or otherwise lawfully present, in the U.S. so that their status is not negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, on March 20, 2020, USCIS announced it will not accept any new requests for premium processing. This temporary suspension includes petitions filed for H-1B visas. The AMA strongly urges USCIS to reconsider this suspension and instead expand the premium processing option to H-1B visas to facilitate an expedited process so that H-1B physicians can provide health care to U.S. patients requiring urgent and critical care due to COVID-19. The AMA also asks that USCIS prioritize change of status

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.aamc.org/news-insights/press-releases/new-findings-confirm-predictions-physician-shortage>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/foreign-trained-doctors-are-critical-to-serving-many-us-communities.pdf>

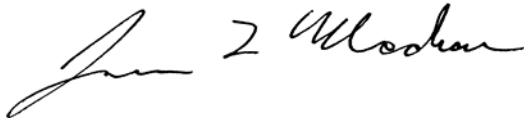
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html>

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applications for those seeking to begin residency training on July 1, 2020, including those seeking a change to O-1, J-1, and H-1B visa statuses.<sup>4</sup>

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. If you should have any questions regarding this letter, please feel free to contact Margaret Garikes, Vice President of Federal Affairs, at [margaret.garikes@ama-assn.org](mailto:margaret.garikes@ama-assn.org) or 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

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<sup>4</sup> This list of visas is not inclusive.