



# Committee of Interns and Residents

## SEIUHealthcare®

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### **CIR STATEMENT ON SUSPENSION OF PREMIUM PROCESSING**

On March 20, 2020, USCIS announced that, effective immediately, it was suspending premium processing for all H-1B cases (as well as a wide variety of other case categories) as a result of the COVID-19 virus. No date for anticipated resumption of premium processing has been provided at this time.

Premium processing is a USCIS service that provides for 15-day expedited processing of a petition or application filed with the Agency. Resident physicians who are entering U.S. residency programs from abroad, and the employers who sponsor them in H-1B status, typically utilize the premium processing service to assure that the residents will arrive timely in the U.S. to begin their patient care duties. Since regular processing has currently been taking 4 months, the ability to fast track a petition or application is critical, especially in instances where full staffing is required to meet the needs of underserved communities. This is acutely relevant now in the midst of this pandemic.

The Committee of Interns and Residents/SEIU (CIR) represents 17,000 resident physicians and fellows nationally, with large concentrations of residents in New York, California, Massachusetts, and Florida, states that have been particularly impacted by the COVID-19 virus to date. Residents are on the front lines of the pandemic, especially in New York City, which is currently seeing the fastest growth of positive cases in the U.S. Given the shortage of physicians in the U.S., the safety net hospitals in New York City, in particular, rely upon international medical graduates (IMGs) to fill their residency positions each year, often in H-1B status. This is seen in bold relief in the Health and Hospitals (H+H) System, the public hospital system serving communities throughout New York City.

Each year, both public and private hospitals join the National Physician Matching Program (the "Match") to bring resident physicians to their residency programs in a variety of specialties. For residents from abroad who Match (word of the results of the Match come out yearly in mid-March) their matching hospital will petition USCIS to approve their employment. Since the typical residency program runs from July 1 through June 30, and residents from abroad must be approved by USCIS to work before commencing employment (and must also have this approval in order to apply for a visa to enter the U.S.) the ability to fast track through premium processing is vital to timely meeting those objectives between mid-March and late June. The current suspension of premium processing means that resident physicians who have committed to their hospitals, and who are needed in those hospitals more than ever given the current national health crisis, will be unable, under current regular processing times, to timely join their programs. This is a disastrous outcome for those doctors, for the current residents who will be adversely impacted by their unfilled slots and lack of vital collegial support, and for the patient population.

CIR respectfully, earnestly and urgently requests that an exception to the suspension of premium processing be created for resident physicians and their employing hospitals so that the petitions filed by their employing hospitals on their behalf are able to be reviewed and processed via premium processing. It cannot be overemphasized that a shortage of doctors at this critical time would be devastating to hospitals and the communities they serve.

March 26, 2020