



CIR Statement on the Suspension of Routine Visa Services

The Department of State announced on March 20, 2020 that, due to the challenges of addressing the COVID-19 virus, all routine immigrant and nonimmigrant visa appointments at all U.S. Embassies and Consulates were cancelled as of that date. Routine services are expected to resume, but the Department is unable to provide a date certain at this juncture. Emergency and "mission critical" visa services are pledged to continue as resources permit.

This shutdown of visa appointments and services for nonimmigrants is potentially devastating for resident physicians in countries abroad who have entered into contracts with U.S. hospitals to staff their residency programs. These resident physicians, who are international medical graduates (IMGs), are expected to enter the U.S. in June and to commence their employment as of July 1. The inability to schedule a visa interview and subsequently have a visa issued means that these residents will be precluded from entering the U.S. to timely join their programs. This is of particular concern during the current health crisis, when the employing hospital is even more anxious to have its full complement of resident physicians on board on July 1 and engaged in patient care. Since residency programs graduate their more senior residents on June 30 of each year, if the incoming residents, who are replacing the departing senior residents, are precluded from entering the U.S. timely, this will place their hospitals in the untenable position of being significantly understaffed.

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 hard hit 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 IMGs to fill their residency positions each year, most often in H-1B and J-1 statuses. This is seen in bold relief in the Health and Hospitals (H+H) System, the public hospital system serving communities throughout New York City.

The current suspension of regular visa processing, with no date set for resumption, 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 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 visa processing be created for resident physicians so that they can join their residency programs and be present at their employing hospitals by July 1. 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