



April 16, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pompeo  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
600 19th Street NW  
Washington, DC 20006

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

Dear Secretary Pompeo and Acting Director Cuccinelli,

On behalf of the Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA) and the HIV Medicine Association (HIVMA), we are writing to urge the Department of State (DoS) and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to ensure that foreign-born international medical graduates (IMGs) are able to fully participate in the response to the COVID-19 national emergency. In light of the role IMGs, including ID and HIV physicians and medical residents are playing in the response to the pandemic, we urge you to temporarily extend visas and other protected status for medical residents and physicians so that their status is not negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and permit medical residents and physicians on J-1 visas to be redeployed as needed to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, we urge you to open visa processing at embassies and consulates worldwide for medical residents and physicians and speed processing of applications for extensions and changes of status for lawfully present medical residents and physicians to either begin a U.S. residency program or assume a position in a medically underserved area of the U.S.

IDSA and HIVMA represent over 12,000 infectious diseases and HIV physicians, scientists, and other healthcare and public health professionals on the frontlines of the COVID-19 response.

The COVID-19 pandemic underscores the vital role of, and significant need for ID and HIV physicians, including those who are foreign-born, in the delivery of life-saving care to patients with COVID-19 disease as well as other serious and emerging infections. Over the past decade, about one third of physicians entering the ID specialty have come from countries other than the US. These physicians, who are practicing in the U.S. on a visa or other protected status, are an essential component of our COVID-19 workforce surge capacity.

Despite the vital role of ID and HIV physicians in our health care system, the work of ID and HIV doctors has been undervalued by the physician reimbursement system which has contributed to the decline of new physicians pursuing ID specialty training. While we are taking steps to address this directly, the shrinking ID and HIV workforce further magnifies the vital role the J-1 Visa program plays in ensuring a strong ID physician workforce. A recent study currently under peer

review for publication showed that counties in the U.S. with the lowest density of ID specialists experienced higher mortality from infection-related deaths compared to counties with higher density of ID physicians. Fortifying the ID and HIV workforce is paramount to ensuring patients with COVID have access to lifesaving ID expertise. Many ID and HIV doctors have used the J-1 Visa program to continue to practice in the U.S. after their fellowships have ended and are currently playing an invaluable role in caring for patients with COVID-19 and other infectious diseases. Our members are reporting a tremendous need for additional J-1 visa slots for ID and HIV physicians in the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, most new medical residents match to their residency programs in March and start training and treating patients on or around July 1, necessitating a predictable and timely visa application process.

IDSA and HIVMA members urge you to ensure that international medical graduates can serve essential roles in combating the COVID-19 pandemic by providing high-quality infectious disease care. An improved ID workforce is absolutely critical to being prepared for future outbreaks, as it is not a matter of ‘if’ but ‘when’ such pandemics might occur.

Thank you for considering this request. The time is *now* to ensure we have the ID and HIV workforce necessary to combat this national public health emergency and save lives. If you have questions or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact Amanda Jezek, IDSA Senior Vice President for Public Policy and Government Relations at [ajezek@idsociety.org](mailto:ajezek@idsociety.org), or Andrea Weddle, HIVMA Executive Director at [aweddle@hivma.org](mailto:aweddle@hivma.org).

Sincerely,



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President, IDSA



Judith Feinberg, MD  
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