



June 12, 2020

Edward J. Ramotowski  
Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Visa Services  
Bureau of Consular Affairs  
U.S. Department of State  
Washington, D.C. 20520

VIA EMAIL

Dear Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary Ramotowski,

I write today on behalf of NAFSA: Association of International Educators to urge the State Department to disclose its plans for future routine visa issuance as soon as possible. While the worldwide suspension of visa services and the five country-specific COVID-19 presidential proclamations remain in effect, U.S. schools and exchange visitor programs need clarity now on future visa issuance in order to plan for and conduct a successful fall 2020 semester.

Regarding the worldwide suspension of routine visa services, we ask that the Department provide an estimate of when the suspension might be lifted and what the process for lifting the suspension will be. Other U.S. federal agencies that have suspended services have already communicated their planned dates for reopening. For example, USCIS began to reopen USCIS field offices on June 4.



Even though the date and scope might change because of exigencies and unforeseen COVID-19-related issues, knowing the plan the Department aspires to for restoring routine visa services will greatly assist in planning for the start of the upcoming academic year.

Our members would also appreciate an update from the Department regarding the nonimmigrant visa appointment process in this context. Some have reported that international students and scholars have been able to secure a visa interview appointment for a specific day in the future. However, further guidance from the Department on how a future visa appointment relates to the visa services suspension and a U.S. consulate's ability to set emergency appointments will help to reduce anxiety and inform advising. Our members and the students and scholars they serve would also benefit from the Department describing how its plan for lifting the worldwide suspension will interface with the five country-specific COVID-19 presidential proclamations currently in effect.

Additionally, we would like to confirm that once routine visa processing resumes, the Department will continue to expedite visa appointments and processing for international students and exchange visitors, who face hard start deadlines for their programs and where delays can devastate educational plans and enrollments.

Given the importance of the upcoming fall 2020 semester to the U.S. economy and to the viability of many U.S. educational institutions, if it is not possible for routine visa services to be restored worldwide we ask that the Department instruct U.S. consulates that



international students and exchange visitors should be considered eligible for emergency appointments at each consulate.

Likewise, for visa applicants in countries still subject to a country-specific COVID-19 presidential proclamation, we ask that international students and exchange visitors as a group be deemed eligible for an exception to the proclamation as “an alien whose entry would be in the national interest, as determined by the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Homeland Security, or their designees.”

We also ask the Department to waive the in-person visa interview requirement to the fullest extent allowable under the law and allow U.S. consulates to conduct interviews via video conferencing. 22 CFR 41.102(c)-(d) grants the Department the authority to waive the personal appearance requirement in the national interest and due to unusual or emergent circumstances. On March 26, 2020, the Department issued guidance allowing consular officers “to expand the categories of H-2 visa applicants whose applications can be adjudicated without an in-person interview,” so there is recent precedent.

Finally, recognizing that the Departments of State and Homeland Security are partners in these matters, we also ask that the agencies continue to coordinate their guidance, and to instruct their respective bureaus and offices to honor their partner agency’s guidance as it is issued.



Thank you for your consideration of this urgent request as the Department continues to update policies that accommodate and address the current difficult situations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,

[signature redacted]

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Executive Director & CEO  
NAFSA: Association of International Educators