

## **Suspension of Routine Visa Services & Impact on H2As**

In response to worldwide challenges related to the outbreak of COVID-19, the Department of State is as of March 18, 2020 suspending routine visa services in all countries with a U.S. Department of State Travel Advisory level of 2, 3, or 4. Check the website of the embassy or consulate for its current operating status. As resources allow, embassies and consulates will continue to provide urgent and emergency visa services. This does not affect the visa waiver program. These Embassies will resume routine visa services as soon as possible but are unable to provide a specific date at this time.

Although all routine immigrant and nonimmigrant visa appointments are cancelled, the MRV fee is valid and may be used for a visa appointment in the country where it was purchased within one year of the date of payment. Applicants with an urgent matter and need to travel immediately should follow the guidance provided at the Embassy's website to request an emergency appointment.

We are well aware of the importance of the H-2 program to the economy and food security of the United States. We are reviewing all possible options. As a matter of policy, consular sections worldwide prioritize H-2A applications, given the significant economic importance of these workers for farmers and small business. We intend to continue processing H-2A cases as much as possible, but will need to modify our procedures in order to facilitate the social distancing recommended by health authorities. Embassies and consulates that continue to offer full visa services are still accepting H-2A applications. At locations where only limited or emergency visa services are currently offered, H-2A applications will be accepted on a limited basis.

Certain returning H-2A workers may qualify for an interview waiver under the INA. These applicants include those whose visas have expired in the last twelve months and are now applying for the same visa classification and did not require a waiver the last time they applied for a visa. Consular sections will prioritize the processing of returning H-2A workers who are eligible for an interview waiver.

The health and safety of mission staff and applicants is of utmost importance. Each Embassy and Consulate worldwide will continue to constantly monitor the situation and adjust visa services to ensure public safety and adhere to local health advisories in order to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19.