

**TO: Training Program Liaisons (TPLs) and J-1 Exchange Visitor Physicians**  
**FROM: ECFMG<sup>®</sup> Exchange Visitor Sponsorship Program**  
**RE: Extension Beyond the Maximum Duration of Stay**

The U.S. Department of State (DOS) authorizes ECFMG to sponsor international medical graduates in accredited programs of graduate medical education and training. Duration of participation in these programs is limited to the time “typically required to complete a program,” as defined by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) and/or one of the specialty boards of the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS). Per the U.S Code of Federal Regulations, duration is further limited to a maximum stay of no more than seven years. Specifically, the regulations state:

“Duration of participation is limited to seven years unless the alien physician has demonstrated to the satisfaction of the Director [of the Department of State] that the country to which the alien physician will return at the end of additional specialty education or training has an exceptional need for an individual with such additional qualification.” [22CFR§62.27(e)(2)]

“The responsible officer [ECFMG] seeking a program extension on behalf of an exchange visitor...shall: (1) Adequately document the reasons which justify such extension; and (2) Secure the prior written approval of the Department of State for such extension.” [22CFR§62.43(c)]

In keeping with these requirements, any international medical graduate seeking to extend his/her participation in ECFMG-sponsored training beyond seven years must file a formal extension request with the DOS through ECFMG. The following documentation is the minimum required to file such a request:

- Complete Application for ECFMG Sponsorship.** Please see J-1 Visa Sponsorship Applications at <http://www.ecfm.org/evsp/application-online.html> for additional information on the application process.
- Letters of Support from Applicant’s Current and Proposed Program Directors.** Both the current and proposed program directors must provide a letter of recommendation/support for the applicant. Letters of support should focus specifically on the benefits of the proposed training and potential added qualification(s).
- Statement of Educational Objectives (SEO) from Applicant.** The SEO must detail the benefits of the proposed training and anticipated professional activities upon return to the home country.
- Letter of “Exceptional Need” from the Home Country Government.** The letter of “exceptional need” is a letter of support signed by either the home country’s Ambassador to the United States or the home country’s Minister of Health confirming an “exceptional need” for the applicant to be trained in the field of medicine being pursued. The DOS requires the letter to use the exact wording of “exceptional need” and provide some detail about the

need. (This letter is separate from and required in addition to the Statement of Need generally required of all applicants. **See following pages for additional detail/explanation about letters of exceptional need.**)

- **ECFMG Application Fees of \$435.00.** Fees include the \$275.00 regular application fee + \$160.00 for exceptional extension case review and preparation. Preferred method of payment is through ECFMG's online payment system, OASIS.
- **DOS Fee of \$233.00.** This fee is separate from any and all ECFMG fees. If possible, this fee should be paid to ECFMG through OASIS. ECFMG will, in turn, submit payment to DOS on behalf of the applicant.

All documentation supporting an applicant's exceptional extension request should be forwarded to ECFMG in one package for review. Should it be determined that the applicant is, indeed, eligible to petition the DOS for an extension of sponsorship beyond seven years, ECFMG will prepare and submit a formal request to the DOS on his/her behalf. As individual circumstances vary, additional documentation may be requested upon application review. It is important to keep in mind that the DOS reserves up to 60 days for review and decision in such cases.

The DOS requires ECFMG to notify all applicants that, should an extension of stay be approved on the basis of an exceptional need in the home country, the approval will weigh heavily in any future consideration of a request for a waiver of the two-year home country physical presence requirement of Section 212(e) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, as amended.

Please do not hesitate to contact Tracy Wallowicz at [twallowicz@ecfm.org](mailto:twallowicz@ecfm.org) with questions about the process by which an extension beyond the maximum duration can be requested.

## **ADDITIONAL DETAIL ABOUT LETTERS OF EXCEPTIONAL NEED**

In a letter dated July 27, 1997, the United States Information Agency (USIA), now part of the U.S. Department of State (DOS), wrote the following to ECFMG:

“Both the Exchange Visitor Program Regulations (22CFR 62.27 9(e)(4)) and the authorizing statute (8 U.S.C. 1182(j)(1)(D)) are very specific and limit the duration of participation for alien physicians to the time typically required to complete a specific program of graduate medical education. The duration of participation is determined by the United States Information Agency based upon criteria promulgated by the Secretary of Health and Human Services, which takes into consideration the requirements of the various medical specialty boards. The criteria are published in the American Medical Association Graduate Medical Education Directory which is recognized as the official listing of programs accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME). The Agency utilizes this directory to determine if a medical program (specialty/subspecialty) has been accredited by the ACGME and the length of time determined by ACGME as necessary prerequisites to be eligible to sit for the exams leading to board certification.

Pursuant to statute, the duration of the exchange visitor program is limited to seven years unless the alien physician can demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Agency that the country to which he/she will be returning at the end of their specialty education or training has an “exceptional need” for an individual with such added qualification. The specific regulation governing this aspect of program participation is set forth at 22 CFR 62.27(e)(2).

In reviewing this regulatory requirement, it has been determined that the government to whom the alien physician will be returning after receiving the proposed additional education / training must provide a letter signed by either the Minister of Health or Ambassador to the United States. This letter must state that there is an “exceptional need” for the applicant to be trained or educated in the field that has been requested and provide brief detail about the need. This letter should be submitted to the Exchange Visitor Program Services office through ECFMG as part of the documentation in support of the request.”

In addressing the 1997 directive as well as the spirit and intent of the Exchange Visitor Program regulations, the DOS instructed ECFMG that, without exception, letters of “exceptional need” must explicitly state that there is an “exceptional need” and go on to provide detail as to how and why such a need exists. The DOS expressed concern that, in recent years, many of the letters of “exceptional need” received by their offices lacked sufficient detail and provided them with little information on which to adequately evaluate petitions for extensions of sponsorship beyond seven years. It is, therefore, ECFMG’s understanding that the DOS is holding the letters of “exceptional need” to a very high standard and is, in all cases, requiring that such letters provide at least a brief overview of circumstances and healthcare needs in the

home country as they relate to the applicant's field of study/training. If such information is unavailable and/or there does not exist an exceptional need in the home country for specialists in the field being pursued, the DOS will not consider a request for an extension of stay. The DOS feels strongly that an extension beyond seven years should be granted only in cases where there is a clear and well-documented need in the home country.

It is important to remind all interested parties that the letter of "exceptional need" is required only of applicants requesting an extension of J-1 sponsorship beyond seven years and is not required with most applications for ECFMG sponsorship. The letter of "exceptional need" is separate from the Statement of Need required of all ECFMG sponsorship applicants. The language prescribed by federal regulation for the Statement of Need (issued by home country Ministries of Health) remains the same. Applicants for extensions of sponsorship beyond seven years are required to provide *both* the general Statement of Need and the letter of "exceptional need."