USCIS has quietly reversed a policy that had placed thousands of foreign doctors in the United States at risk of losing work authorization and, in some cases, their underlying immigration status.

Under a Department of Homeland Security policy implemented earlier this year, USCIS had paused or delayed the adjudication of certain immigration benefits for nationals of 39 countries connected to the administration's expanded travel restrictions.

USCIS has now confirmed that applications associated with medical physicians will continue processing. Doctors are no longer subject to adjudicative holds that had been applied under the enhanced screening and vetting framework.

What changed

The reversal did not come through a press conference or a formal public announcement. Instead, it appeared as an update to USCIS public facing guidance describing its internal review process for processing holds.

USCIS added language indicating that holds have been lifted for multiple categories of cases, including "applications associated with medical physicians." The relevant section reads:

> "Internal Review Process

> “USCIS established an internal process for lifting holds on individual or group cases, requiring comprehensive review by multiple offices. Holds have been lifted for aliens vetted through Operation PARRIS, certain petitions filed by U.S. citizens, intercountry adoption forms, certain rescheduled oath ceremonies, statutory and regulatory decision issuance, refugee registrations for South African citizens/nationals, certain special immigrant visa petitions, certain employment authorization documents, and asylum applications from non high-risk countries, and applications associated with medical physicians….”

This update is significant because it signals that physician related filings will not remain stuck in the same adjudicative queue that previously blocked or delayed benefits for many applicants from the designated countries.

What the prior freeze affected

The earlier policy created a broad adjudicative slowdown for covered nationals, which impacted medical professionals in several ways:

- Delays in employment authorization documents, which can directly affect a physician’s ability to remain on payroll.
- Uncertainty in the processing of adjustment of status applications and related benefits.
- Extended waits for case decisions where timing is tied to training programs, licensing requirements, credentialing, or

contract start dates.

Hospitals and medical employers reported being forced into contingency planning. In some cases, physicians were placed on administrative leave because work authorization renewals were not processed on time. In other cases, the risk was more severe, including potential loss of lawful ability to work, missed start dates for residencies or fellowships, and cascading effects on staffing schedules.

Advocacy organizations also reported serious personal consequences. Some physicians from Africa, the Middle East, and Venezuela reportedly faced loss of work authorization or detention tied to delayed processing or travel related complications. Estimates cited by advocacy groups suggested that nearly 1,000 physicians completing residencies and fellowships this year were at risk of losing placements in underserved areas because of the freeze and related processing delays.

What the exemption does and does not do

The USCIS change provides immediate relief by allowing physician related applications to continue moving through the system. It addresses one of the most disruptive components of the earlier policy, the adjudicative processing hold.

At the same time, it does not eliminate broader instability linked to travel restrictions and shifting adjudication standards.

Even with holds lifted for physician associated cases, delays can still occur for other reasons, including background check processing, requests for evidence, interview scheduling, consular processing backlogs, or policy changes that affect particular visa classifications. Hospitals that rely heavily on foreign medical graduates may continue to face long term uncertainty when immigration rules change abruptly or when processing patterns fluctuate without notice.

Still, by removing physician cases from the freeze category, USCIS has reduced the risk that doctors will lose work authorization solely because their filings were placed into an extended hold status.