

Dear Fulbrighters,

On March 19 the U.S. Department of State issued a Global Level 4 Travel Advisory recommending that all Americans abroad either return to the United States or prepare to shelter in place for an indefinite period of time, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a result of this announcement, the U.S. Fulbright Program was suspended worldwide, and the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) entered into close and ongoing dialogue with U.S. Embassies and Fulbright Commissions about how best to facilitate urgent departures for U.S. Fulbrighters abroad, as well as how to support those who may determine that it is in their best interest to remain where they are. **The following guidance supersedes that which you received from the Fulbright Commission a week ago on Friday, March 20.**

As the COVID-19 situation continues to escalate worldwide, ECA has asked Commissions to accentuate and reiterate that Fulbrighters still in country should consider departing as urgently as possible, and to understand the health and travel challenges that delaying that decision might entail. In this fluid situation ECA has tightened its guidance and **has insisted that U.S. Chiefs of Mission set a departure deadline within the next two weeks for Fulbrighters to depart Norway.**

In order to give you as much time as possible to assess your individual situation, we are setting that date as late as ECA is permitting, which is April 12, 2020.

If you choose to remain in Norway after that time, you will be doing so as a private U.S. citizen and an alumnus of the Fulbright program. Whether you choose to depart or to remain, you will receive the balance of the stipend that was due to you as per the grant authorization, through June 30, 2020. If you depart, that funding should be used toward settling your debts and paying for travel costs that exceed your travel. If you can document excessive ticket costs above and beyond that, ECA will reimburse them. For those who decide to stay beyond April 12, ECA will also reimburse your repatriation travel undertaken at a later date.

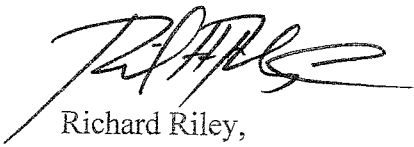
Please note, however, that whether you depart Norway or decide to stay, you will no longer receive ASPE benefits after April 12. ECA has determined that the Accident and Sickness Program for Exchanges (ASPE) is valid only while you are in your country of assignment on an active Fulbright award, and for the transitional period between suspension of the program and the mandatory departure date. Some of you have coverage in addition to ASPE. Those who do not should keep in mind that Norway is a country with a strong public health system and that payment for medical service beyond a nominal fee is not the rule. Moreover, all people in Norway, irrespective of nationality and private coverage, have a right to healthcare.

Please know that if you decide to remain in Norway as a private citizen after the April 12 date of authorized extension, it is our understanding from the Norwegian authorities that **your residency status will remain the same as it is now, until its original expiration date.** At present, there are no plans for evacuation flights to the United States, and many regular flights to the U.S. have already been cancelled. We strongly recommend that you visit the U.S. Embassy website to review all relevant updates, and if you have not done so already, enroll in STEP.

We ask you to understand that the guidance from the U.S. Department of State is motivated by its primary responsibility, which is to get U.S. citizens home safely. However, you have the right to decide what course of action in these current circumstances makes the most sense for your well-being, and that of your family.

We at the Commission and U.S. Embassy Oslo are committed to supporting you in every way that we can.

Sincerely,



Richard Riley,
Chargé d'Affaires, ad interim
U.S. Embassy Oslo, Norway



Petter Næss
Executive Director
U.S.-Norway Fulbright Foundation