What You Need to Know about F-1 Severe Economic Hardship Employment Authorization

WHAT IS IT?

Severe Economic Hardship Employment is off-campus employment authorization for students who are experiencing serious financial difficulties caused by unforeseen circumstances beyond their control that occurred after they applied for and received the F-1 visa or I-20 (for students who changed status in the U.S.). If authorized, you may get any kind of legal employment anywhere in the U.S. and work a maximum of 20 hours per week while school is in session (fall and spring semesters) and full-time during vacation periods.

HOW CAN YOU QUALIFY FOR IT?

1. You must have been in F-1 status for one academic year.
2. On-campus employment has been either unavailable or insufficient to meet your needs.
3. You must be able to provide EVIDENCE which proves that you have financial problems that are caused by unforeseen circumstances beyond your control. Any reasons are acceptable as long as you can convince USCIS that they could not have been avoided and are beyond your control.

Examples of unexpected expenses may be: unexpected medical expenses, illness or death of a sponsor or a sponsor’s family member, a sponsor’s business problems, natural disasters or other problems where your sponsor lives, currency devaluations, or large tuition increases.

If your financial difficulties are caused by problems your sponsor is having (the person who provided you with the financial support to receive your Form I-20), that person should provide evidence of the unexpected circumstances that are now affecting your support and complete a Revised Affidavit of Financial Support indicating the new amount that will be provided (if any) and evidence of continued financial capability to provide it. Evidence may include newspaper/journal/web articles, official school notices, medical bills, death notice, etc.

HOW DO YOU APPLY?

If you think that you qualify for Severe Economic Hardship Employment authorization but would like to discuss the process further, make an appointment with your ISSS advisor to discuss your situation.

Once you submit the required documentation and we believe that you have a reasonable case, we will recommend that USCIS authorize your employment due to severe economic hardship, issue you a new I-20, and you will send your application to USCIS to process your work authorization.
HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE?

After you send your application to USCIS, plan that it will take about three months for your EAD (Employment Authorization Document) to be returned to us from USCIS.

Sometimes USCIS will write asking for more evidence of your financial problems. If you receive a Request for Evidence, please let us know; this may delay your application processing.

HOW LONG WILL I BE ABLE TO WORK?

USCIS grants hardship employment authorization for one-year periods. It can be renewed annually up to your expected date of completion of studies.

Your employment authorization is automatically terminated if you fail to maintain your F-1 student status.

YOU CANNOT START WORKING UNTIL USCIS AUTHORIZES YOUR EMPLOYMENT AND YOU RECEIVE AN EAD!