Stalled permanent residency application has left London, Ont., engineer's life 'on hold'

Aravind Shaju, 25, has stopped working at a local lab as his application isn't processed

After completing a program in mechanical engineering at Fanshawe College, Aravind Shaju was working at a lab in London, Ont., but had to leave when his work permit expired. He's been waiting 14 months to have his permanent residency status application processed. (Submitted by Aravind Shaju)

Amid an economy stricken by the COVID-19 pandemic, 25-year-old Aravind Shaju had to reluctantly step away from his job as an engineer at a lab in London, Ont.

There's no issue with Shaju's work or the operation at Shamir Canada, which

manufactures lenses for glasses.

Shaju, who was born in India and came to Canada in 2017, can't work legally because his application for permanent residency status isn't moving forward.

Shaju filed his application in April 2020 under the Canadian experience class stream, and was told a response time of six to eight months is typical. He's completed his studies at Fanshawe College.

Now, 14 months later, Shaju is still waiting for his permanent residency application to be processed. He says even the security check component of his application appears to be stalled.

"My whole life is in limbo because of this huge delay," he told CBC News. "It's causing a lot of economic stress and having an effect on my mental health."

- **'I never wanted to leave Canada': COVID-19 delaying permanent resident applications**

Shaju has made contact with other applicants for permanent residency status, and said many people who filed their applications in the first and second quarter of 2020 have had longer-than-usual delays getting their applications processed.

People in the same situation are using the #Finalize2020Q1Q2InlandPR Twitter hashtag as a forum to call on the government to finalize permanent residency applications for people living in Canada who filed their applications in early 2020.

There's also an online petition with more than 3,100 signatures.

Shaju said being unable to work is causing great hardship for people already

cut off from family members. Also, the lack of residency means he can't access health care.

"They are in fact playing with people's lives here," he said.

CBC News reached out to the office of Immigration Minister Marco Mendicino for comment.

The office sent a statement that says the pandemic has led to delays in processing times as offices closed and immigration workers shifted to working from home. The statement also says the ministry is taking steps to modernize the immigration system in ways that will speed up applications.

Lawyer says delays are easing

Ed Corrigan, a London lawyer with a specialty in citizenship, immigration and refugee issues, believes the delays are understandable because the pandemic effectively shut down the processing of immigration files.

"COVID has really put a crimp in things," he said. "From March to September, almost nothing was happening. It took quite a while for the system to adjust."

Corrigan said immigration officers are working from home and most immigration hearings are taking place via Zoom. He believes that as more people are immunized and the government becomes accustomed to a new way of working, the backlog will ease.

- **Lives on hold, potential immigrants devastated by pandemic delays**

"Things are picking up already. They're not giving people reliable estimates of timelines," he said. "I've got clients outside the country who are stuck there because of travel restrictions. It's frustrating for people, but, unfortunately,

it's very typical."

Shaju said he understands the pandemic will push back the timelines, but based on what he's hearing from other applicants from early 2020, their files appear to be in some unique holding pattern. He's spoken with people whose applications are moving ahead, even though they were submitted after his.

"We are getting ignored," he said. "Our applications are simply not being processed."