Office of Communications

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Press Release

USCIS Proposes Revisions for Religious Worker Visa Classifications

Proposed Rule Highlights Steps to Eliminate Fraud in the Religious Worker Program

WASHINGTON—U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is proposing significant revisions to its regulations related to the special immigrant (SR/SD) and nonimmigrant (R-1) religious worker visa classifications. The proposed rule highlights ways to ensure the integrity of the religious worker program while at the same time streamlining the process for legitimate petitioners.

"USCIS remains committed to seeking out and eliminating fraud and misrepresentation in the immigration system," said USCIS Director Emilio Gonzalez. "We recognize the importance of the religious worker program and the valuable service it provides to genuine religious organizations. Part of our effort to ensure a secure and efficient immigration system is detecting and combating deception that, in this instance, ultimately deprives legitimate organizations from participating in a worthwhile program. We're confident that this rule will go a long way to eliminate the opportunities for fraud in the program."

Currently, non-immigrants may request a religious worker visa at a consular post or a port-of-entry without any prior, stateside review of the petition. One of the key changes to the regulations include an across the board petition requirement that will allow USCIS to verify the legitimacy of the petitioner and the job offer before a visa is issued or the worker is admitted into the United States.

The rule also reduces the initial period of admission for a non-immigrant from three years to one, giving the agency an opportunity to review whether or not the terms of the visa have been met during the initial year before extending the worker's stay in the United States.

USCIS is also proposing to add new definitions, or amend current ones, to better describe the statutory eligibility criteria. The rule streamlines the petition process by requiring an attestation and requesting less supporting evidence. The rule includes detailed interpretations of the statutory requirements and clear guidelines for supporting documentation aimed at making the process easier to understand.

The proposal is posted at www.uscis.gov. USCIS will accept public comments until June 25, 2007. More information on the proposed revisions for religious worker classifications is available in an accompanying Fact Sheet.

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