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U.S. Citizenship
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FILE: EAC-02-254-50451 Office: VERMONT SERVICE CENTER

Date: FEB 24 2005

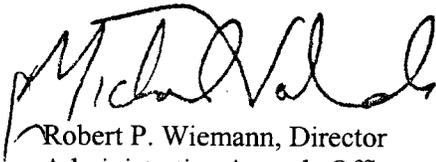
IN RE: Petitioner:
Beneficiary:

PETITION: Immigrant petition for Alien Worker as a Skilled Worker or Professional pursuant to section 203(b)(3) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1153(b)(3)

ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER:

INSTRUCTIONS:

This is the decision of the Administrative Appeals Office in your case. All documents have been returned to the office that originally decided your case. Any further inquiry must be made to that office.


Robert P. Wiemann, Director
Administrative Appeals Office

DISCUSSION: The immigrant visa petition was denied by the director of the Vermont Service Center and is now before the Administrative Appeals Office (AAO) on appeal. The director's decision will be withdrawn and the matter remanded for entry of a new decision.

The petitioner is a hospital. It seeks to permanently employ the beneficiary in the United States as a registered nurse. The petitioner asserts that the beneficiary qualifies for blanket labor certification pursuant to 20 C.F.R. § 656.10, Schedule A, Group I. The director denied the petition after making a determination that the beneficiary was not qualified for the position as there was no evidence of a CFGNS certificate, unrestricted state license to practice nursing, or letter from the state of intended employment confirming passage of the NCLEX-RN examination showing eligibility to issue a license to practice nursing in the state, issued to the beneficiary.

On appeal, counsel initially submitted a brief and copies of evidence formerly submitted into the record of proceeding. Counsel stated, in part, that the beneficiary does not need to produce proof of a CFGNS certificate, state license, or verification of passing the NCLEX-RN examination because Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS) and its predecessor service approved other cases without them at the visa petition stage and only required proof of the beneficiaries' qualifications when consular processing as lawful permanent residents prior to entering the United States. Additionally, counsel stated that because of these past approvals and current denials, CIS must be changing its policy without providing notice to the public. Subsequent to the submission of his brief, counsel submitted a copy of a CGFNS certificate issued to the beneficiary and pre-dating the filing of the petition.

Section 203(b)(3) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the "Act"), 8 U.S.C. § 1153(b)(3), provides for the granting of preference classification to qualified immigrants who are capable, at the time of petitioning for classification under this paragraph, of performing skilled or unskilled labor, not of a temporary or seasonal nature, for which qualified workers are not available in the United States. This section also provides for the granting of preference classification to qualified immigrants who hold baccalaureate degrees and are members of the professions.

In this case, the petitioner filed an Immigrant Petition for Alien Worker (Form I-140) for classification of the beneficiary under section 203(b)(3)(A)(i) of the Act as a registered nurse on July 30, 2002. Aliens who will be permanently employed as professional nurses are listed on Schedule A as occupations set forth at 20 C.F.R. § 656.10 for which the Director of the United States Employment Service has determined that there are not sufficient United States workers who are able, willing, qualified and available, and that the employment of aliens in such occupations will not adversely affect the wages and working conditions of United States workers similarly employed. Also, according to 20 C.F.R. § 656.10, aliens who will be permanently employed as professional nurses must have (1) passed the Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools (CGFNS) Examination, or (2) hold a full and unrestricted license to practice professional nursing in the [s]tate of intended employment.

An employer shall apply for a labor certification for a Schedule A occupation by filing an Application for Alien Employment Certification (Form ETA-750 at Part A) in duplicate with the appropriate CIS office. Pursuant to 20 C.F.R. § 656.22, the Application for Alien Employment Certification shall include:

1. Evidence of prearranged employment for the alien beneficiary by having an employer complete and sign the job offer description portion of the application form.

2. Evidence that notice of filing the Application for Alien Employment Certification was provided to the bargaining representative or the employer's employees as prescribed in 20 C.F.R. § 656.20(g)(3).

With the initial petition, the petitioner provided copies of the beneficiary's academic accolades, license to practice nursing in the Philippines, and a CGFNS certificate issued to the beneficiary on October 18, 2001.

Despite the CGFNS certificate in the record of proceeding, the director issued a request for evidence on February 18, 2003, requesting proof of the beneficiary's passage of the CGFNS examination or an unrestricted license to practice nursing in the state of intended employment pursuant to 20 C.F.R. § 656.10. The director also requested the petitioner's posting notice pursuant to 20 C.F.R. § 656.20(g)(1).

In response, counsel stated the following:

[The b]eneficiary does not yet have these requirements. However, despite not having them, [the] beneficiary remains qualified for issuance of an approval of the application for an approved I-140.

The reason is that the [Immigration & Nationality Act] and [CIS] regulations do not require that the beneficiary present CGFNS, the visa screen, TWE, TSE, or TOEFL prior to an appearance at either the Consulate where the beneficiary is being interviewed for issuance of an immigrant visa, or at [a CIS] office during an adjustment interview.

Counsel referenced sections 212(a)(5)(C) of the Act and 8 C.F.R. § 204.5 for the proposition that submitting proof of the beneficiary's CGFNS certificate or license is only a ground of inadmissibility during consular processing or adjustment of status and not a requirement at the I-140 stage. Counsel also referenced a CIS memorandum dated January 28, 1997 from the Office of Examination as well as a cable of instructions issued by the Secretary of State in December 1996. Counsel submitted copies of the portion of the Act and regulations he references, as well as the CIS memorandum, "[CIS] Letter Discussing Foreign Health Care Workers," dated January 28, 1997 and issued by the Office of Examination, and a U.S. Department of State cable of instructions dated December 1996.

Counsel also submitted a posting notice that provides information about the position, such as the position's requirements and terms, pay rate, contact information for application, and ability to contact the state's Department of Labor. The posting notice does not indicate how long it was posted or where, but counsel's cover letter states "[the posting notice] was placed on the bulletin board [outside the petitioner's personnel office] on or about July 2, 2002. It remained on the bulletin board until August 27, 2002."

The director denied the petition on June 2, 2003 for failure to produce proof that the beneficiary passed the CGFNS examination, had an unrestricted license to practice nursing, or had a letter verifying passage of the NCLEX examination in the state of intended employment. Counsel, on appeal, reiterates his arguments in response to the director's request for evidence. He also quoted from a memorandum issued by CIS, dated December 20, 2002, and signed by Thomas E. Cook, Acting Assistant Commissioner, Office of Adjudications, as further evidence that "[CIS] and the Center Director was routinely approving I-140 petitions for registered nurses, based on [prior] memorandums and policy formations. . . This change came totally without notice to the public, and after [the] petitioner had already relied on this policy and submitted the Form I-140 to [CIS] for adjudication."

One of the first issues raised by counsel is an estoppel argument. Counsel asserts that the petitioner relied upon past approvals of petitions that lacked evidence of the beneficiary's qualifications and invested time and money in its current cases. Thus, although counsel asserts that whether or not estoppel in this case should be applied is a question for another forum, he asserts that equity favors the petitioner. The AAO, like the Board of Immigration Appeals, is without authority to apply the doctrine of equitable estoppel so as to preclude a component part of CIS from undertaking a lawful course of action that it is empowered to pursue by statute or regulation. *See Matter of Hernandez-Puente*, 20 I&N Dec. 335, 338 (BIA 1991). Estoppel is an equitable form of relief that is available only through the courts. The jurisdiction of the AAO is limited to that authority specifically granted to it by the Secretary of the United States Department of Homeland Security. *See* DHS Delegation Number 0150.1 (effective March 1, 2003); *see also* 8 C.F.R. § 2.1 (2004). The jurisdiction of the AAO is limited to those matters described at 8 C.F.R. § 103.1(f)(3)(E)(iii) (as in effect on February 28, 2003). Accordingly, the AAO has no authority to address the petitioner's equitable estoppel claim.

Counsel's assertion that CIS must approve cases in error because cases were approved in the past lacks documentary evidence and precedential support. The record of proceeding does not contain copies of the visa petitions that counsel claims were previously approved. It must be emphasized that each petition filing is a separate proceeding with a separate record. *See* 8 C.F.R. § 103.8(d). In making a determination of statutory eligibility, CIS is limited to the information contained in that individual record of proceeding. *See* 8 C.F.R. § 103.2(b)(16)(ii). It was impracticable for the director to provide the petitioner with an explanation as to why the prior approvals were erroneous, as counsel suggests.

Counsel states that CIS approved other petitions that had been previously filed on behalf of other nurses sponsored by the petitioner. The director's decision does not indicate whether he reviewed the prior approvals of any other immigrant petitions. If the previous immigrant petitions were approved based on the same unsupported and contradictory assertions that are contained in the current record, the approvals would constitute clear and gross error on the part of the director. The AAO is not required to approve applications or petitions where eligibility has not been demonstrated, merely because of prior approvals that may have been erroneous. *See, e.g. Matter of Church Scientology International*, 19 I&N Dec. 593, 597 (Comm. 1988). It would be absurd to suggest that CIS or any agency must treat acknowledged errors as binding precedent. *Sussex Engg. Ltd. v. Montgomery*, 825 F.2d 1084, 1090 (6th Cir. 1987), *cert denied*, 485 U.S. 1008 (1988).

Furthermore, the AAO's authority over the service centers is comparable to the relationship between a court of appeals and a district court. Even if a service center director had approved the immigrant petitions on behalf of the beneficiary, the AAO would not be bound to follow the contradictory decision of a service center. *Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra v. INS*, 2000 WL 282785 (E.D. La.), *aff'd*, 248 F.3d 1139 (5th Cir. 2001), *cert. denied*, 122 S.Ct. 51 (2001).

In light of the fact that the petitioner has established the beneficiary's qualifications for the proffered position since there is a CGFNS certificate in the record of proceeding that pre-dates the filing of the petition, counsel's arguments are irrelevant. Thus, the director's decision to deny the petition, based exclusively upon the issue of the beneficiary's qualifications, is withdrawn.

Beyond the decision of the director, however, the record does not contain evidence that the petitioner fully complied with regulatory requirements governing the posting notice. Under 20 C.F.R. § 656.20, the regulations require the following:

In applications filed under 656.21 (Basic Process), 656.21a (Special Handling) and 656.22 (Schedule A), the employer shall document that notice of the filing of the Application for Alien Employment Certification was provided:

- (i) To the bargaining representative(s) (if any) of the employer's employees in the occupational classification for which certification of the job opportunity is sought in the employer's location(s) in the area of intended employment.
- (ii) If there is no such bargaining representative, by posted notice to the employer's employees at the facility or location of the employment. The notice shall be posted for at least 10 consecutive days. The notice shall be clearly visible and unobstructed while posted and shall be posted in conspicuous places, where the employer's U.S. workers can readily read the posted notice on their way to or from their place of employment. Appropriate locations for posting notices of the job opportunity include, but are not limited to, locations in the immediate vicinity of the wage and hour notices required by 20 CFR 516.4 or occupational safety and health notices required by 20 CFR 1903.2(a).

Despite counsel's assertion, there is no proof that the posting notice was posted for ten days. It is noted that without documentary evidence to support the claim, the assertions of counsel will not satisfy the petitioner's burden of proof. *Matter of Obaigbena*, 19 I&N Dec. 533, 534 (BIA 1988); *Matter of Ramirez-Sanchez*, 17 I&N Dec. 503, 506 (BIA 1980). Simply going on record without supporting documentary evidence is not sufficient for purposes of meeting the burden of proof in these proceedings. See *Matter of Treasure Craft of California*, 14 I&N Dec. 190 (Reg. Comm. 1972). No attestation or proof was provided by the petitioner that it posted the notice for ten days outside of its personnel office. Additionally, if counsel's assertion is true and the petitioner posted the notice until August 27, 2002, it is unclear that the petitioner established eligibility for the benefit at the time of filing. A petitioner must establish the elements for the approval of the petition at the time of filing. A petition may not be approved if the beneficiary was not qualified at the priority date, but expects to become eligible at a subsequent time. *Matter of Katigbak*, 14 I&N Dec. at 49. In this case, the petition was filed on July 30, 2002. The purpose of requiring the employer to post notice of the job opportunity is to provide U.S. workers with a meaningful opportunity to compete for the job and to assure that the wages and working conditions of United States workers similarly employed will not be adversely affected by the employment of aliens in Schedule A occupations.¹ Since the petitioner had not removed the notice prior to filing the petition, it does not seem to be possible that it completed the process of considering qualified U.S. workers and any notices or comments submitted to the U.S. Department of Labor.

In view of the foregoing, the previous decision of the director will be withdrawn. The petition is remanded to the director consideration of the issue stated above. The director may request any additional evidence considered pertinent. Similarly, the petitioner may provide additional evidence within a reasonable period of time to be determined by the director. Upon receipt of all the evidence, the director will review the entire record and enter a new decision.

As always, the burden of proof in these proceedings rests solely with the petitioner. Section 291 of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1361.

¹ See the Immigration Act of 1990, Pub.L. No. 101-649, 122(b)(1), 1990 Stat. 358 (1990); see also Labor Certification Process for the Permanent Employment of Aliens in the United States and Implementation of the Immigration Act of 1990, 56 Fed. Reg. 32,244 (July 15, 1991).

ORDER: The director's decision is withdrawn. The petition is remanded to the director for further action in accordance with the foregoing and entry of a new decision, which, if adverse to the petitioner, is to be certified to the AAO for review.