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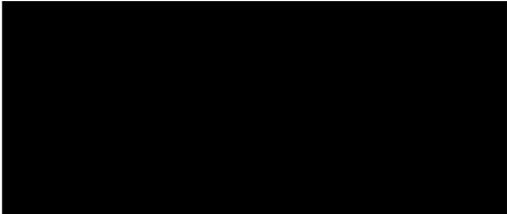
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
U. S. Citizenship and Immigration Services  
Office of Administrative Appeals MS 2090  
Washington, DC 20529-2090



U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
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FILE: [REDACTED] Office: CALIFORNIA SERVICE CENTER Date:  
EAC 06 082 51444

MAY 19 2010

IN RE: Petitioner: [REDACTED]  
Beneficiary: [REDACTED]

PETITION: Immigrant Petition for Special Immigrant Religious Worker Pursuant to Section 203(b)(4) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the Act), 8 U.S.C. § 1153(b)(4), as described at Section 101(a)(27)(C) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(27)(C)

ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER:  
[REDACTED]

INSTRUCTIONS:

Enclosed please find the decision of the Administrative Appeals Office in your case. All of the documents related to this matter have been returned to the office that originally decided your case. Please be advised that any further inquiry that you might have concerning your case must be made to that office.

Thank you,

Perry Rhew  
Chief, Administrative Appeals Office

**DISCUSSION:** The Director, Vermont Service Center, denied the employment-based immigrant visa petition. The matter is now before the Administrative Appeals Office (AAO) on appeal. The AAO will withdraw the director's decision and remand the petition to the California Service Center for further consideration and action pursuant to new regulations.

As required under section 2(b)(1) of the Special Immigrant Nonminister Religious Worker Program Act, Pub. L. No. 110-391, 122 Stat. 4193 (2008), U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) promulgated a rule setting forth new regulations for special immigrant religious worker petitions. Supplementary information published with the new rule specified: "All cases pending on the rule's effective date . . . will be adjudicated under the standards of this rule. If documentation is required under this rule that was not required before, the petition will not be denied. Instead the petitioner will be allowed a reasonable period of time to provide the required evidence or information." 73 Fed. Reg. 72276, 72285 (Nov. 26, 2008).

Section 557(b) of the Administrative Procedure Act (APA), 5 U.S.C. § 557(b), provides that an initial agency decision is not final if "there is an appeal to, or review on motion of, the agency within time provided by rule." The director denied the petition on November 6, 2008, and the beneficiary filed a timely appeal on December 8, 2008. USCIS published the new rule during the allotted appeal period, and therefore we find that the matter was still pending, with no final decision, on November 26, 2008. Because there is a pending appeal, USCIS has not issued a final decision on the instant proceeding. Accordingly, the matter is still pending and therefore subject to the new rule.

We note that, on the Form I-360 petition, the petitioner listed the beneficiary's "Current Nonimmigrant Status" as "Overstay," his nonimmigrant status having expired on August 8, 1999. If this is true, then the beneficiary's lack of lawful immigration status is a facially disqualifying factor according to the regulations at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(m)(4) (which requires the beneficiary's prior qualifying employment in the United States to have been "in lawful immigration status") and 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(m)(11) (which requires that the beneficiary's prior employment, "if acquired in the United States, must have been authorized under United States immigration law").

**ORDER:** The matter is remanded to the director, California Service Center, for the issuance of a request for evidence (if necessary) and a new decision in accordance with the requirements of the new regulation published at 73 Fed. Reg. 72276 (Nov. 26, 2008). If the new decision is adverse to the petitioner, it shall be certified to the Administrative Appeals Office for review.