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FILE: WAC 08 079 50656 Office: CALIFORNIA SERVICE CENTER Date: **SEP 16 2009**

IN RE: Petitioner:
Beneficiary:

PETITION: Petition for a Nonimmigrant Worker Pursuant to Section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b)

ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER:

SELF-REPRESENTED

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.

If you believe the law was inappropriately applied or you have additional information that you wish to have considered, you may file a motion to reconsider or a motion to reopen. Please refer to 8 C.F.R. § 103.5 for the specific requirements. All motions must be submitted to the office that originally decided your case by filing a Form I-290B, Notice of Appeal or Motion, with a fee of \$585. Any motion must be filed within 30 days of the decision that the motion seeks to reconsider or reopen, as required by 8 C.F.R. § 103.5(a)(1)(i).

John F. Grissom

Acting Chief, Administrative Appeals Office

DISCUSSION: The Director, California Service Center, denied the nonimmigrant visa petition and the matter is now before the Administrative Appeals Office (AAO) on appeal. The appeal will be dismissed. The petition will be denied.

On the Form I-129, Petition for a Nonimmigrant Worker, the petitioner states that it engages in software consulting, training, and development, that it was established in 1998, employs 105 persons, has a gross annual income of \$8,000,000, and has a net annual income of \$1,000,000. It seeks to extend the employment of the beneficiary as a programmer analyst from June 16, 2008 to December 31, 2010. Accordingly, the petitioner endeavors to classify the beneficiary as a nonimmigrant worker in a specialty occupation pursuant to section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the Act), 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b).

On October 18, 2008, the director denied the petition, determining that the petitioner failed to establish that: (1) it is in compliance with the terms and conditions of employment; (2) it meets the regulatory definition of an intending United States employer at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii); (3) it meets the definition of “agent” at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(2)(i)(F); (4) it submitted a valid labor condition application (LCA) for all locations; or (5) the proffered position is a specialty occupation.

On appeal, the petitioner submits a statement and documentation in support of the Form-I-290B, and contends that the director’s decision is erroneous on each of the issues discussed.

The record includes: (1) the Form I-129 and supporting documentation filed with United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) on January 23, 2008; (2) the director’s request for evidence (RFE); (3) the petitioner’s response to the director’s RFE; (4) the director’s denial decision; and, (5) the Form I-290B and the petitioner’s brief and documentation submitted in support of the appeal. The AAO reviewed the record in its entirety before issuing its decision.

When filing the Form I-129 petition, the petitioner averred in its January 16, 2008 letter in support of the petition that it is in the business of “designing and developing software solutions for a wide range of commercial and scientific applications.” It further stated that its mission was “to help our clients succeed in the global market place by exceeding their expectations and delivering value in everything we do.” Regarding the beneficiary, the petitioner stated that he would be employed as a programmer analyst with an annual salary of \$50,000. The petitioner submitted an offer of employment also dated January 16, 2008 offering the beneficiary the position of programmer analyst with an annual salary of \$50,000, health insurance, and legal fees to obtain H-1B classification. The initial record also included the petitioner’s approval notice for the beneficiary’s H-1B classification valid from September 15, 2005 to June 15, 2008. The initial record further included a Form ETA 9035E, Labor Condition Application, certified by the Department of Labor on January 15, 2008 for a programmer analyst position in Arlington Heights, Illinois with a prevailing annual wage of \$43,368 and the annual rate of pay for the intended beneficiary at \$45,000.

The director found the initial evidence insufficient to establish eligibility for the benefit sought, and issued an RFE on March 25, 2008. In the request, among other things, the director: asked the petitioner to clarify the petitioner’s employer-employee relationship with the beneficiary; requested

evidence that a specialty occupation exists for the beneficiary; requested copies of signed contracts between the petitioner and the beneficiary; requested a complete itinerary of services or engagements that specifies the dates of each service or engagement, the names and addresses of the actual employers, and the names and addresses of the establishment, venues, or locations where the services will be performed for the period of time requested; requested copies of signed contractual agreements, statements of work, work orders, service agreements, and letters between the petitioner and the authorized officials of the ultimate end-client companies where the work will actually be performed that specifically lists the beneficiary by name on the contracts and provides a detailed description of the duties the beneficiary will perform; requested a detailed description of any in-house projects in which the beneficiary would be involved; and requested information regarding the petitioner's premises and its organizational chart and copies of its federal tax returns and its state and federal quarterly wage reports.

In a June 13, 2008 response, the petitioner addressed the director's queries. The petitioner indicated that it is an agent performing the function of an employer and that its services could be "broadly classified into two segments: One, development of software for clients' applications at its main office in Arlington Heights, IL 60005; and second, if requested by the client, providing SAP services to client's worksites." The petitioner indicated that at the time of filing the petition in January 2008, the beneficiary was engaged in in-house software development at the petitioner's main office in Arlington Heights, Illinois but that the petitioner subsequently assigned the beneficiary to work for Abbott Laboratories, Inc. in Abbott Park, Illinois. The petitioner submitted a new LCA certified by the department of Labor on April 16, 2008 for the Chicago metro area showing the prevailing wage as \$43,368 and the beneficiary's rate of pay as \$48,000. The petitioner indicated that the beneficiary would return to the petitioner's main office when the Abbott Laboratories project was completed.

The petitioner provided a copy of an employment agreement between the petitioner and the beneficiary dated January 16, 2008, in support of its assertion that it is an agent performing the function of the employer. The employment agreement provided an overview of the beneficiary's duties as a programmer analyst and listed the beneficiary's salary as \$48,000. The petitioner provided an April 17, 2008 letter signed by the IT Program Manager at Abbott Laboratories indicating that the beneficiary currently worked at Abbott Laboratories as an SAP SD Configurator/Analyst and that his contract was from March 14, 2008 to December 31, 2008.

The petitioner also provided a copy of its lease for Suites 54-55 at 415 West Golf Road, Arlington Heights, Illinois. The petitioner noted that it operated out of Suite 54 while its "sister" company operated out of Suite 55, and that each company had separate employees and separate clientele, but shared the same work labs and training facilities. The lease agreement shows the leased premises include 5,682 square feet. The petitioner also submitted documentation in the form of its corporate brochure, corporate tax returns, quarterly wage reports, W-2 forms, and a list of other H-1B employees in response to the RFE.

On October 18, 2008, the director denied the petition. The director found that the petitioner is a contractor that subcontracts workers with a variety of computer skills to other companies who need computer programming services. The director found that the petitioner had not provided evidence of

the beneficiary's employment on in-house projects, had provided a letter from a third party company dated subsequent to the filing of the petition regarding work in Abbott Park, Illinois, had submitted a new LCA submitted certified subsequent to the filing date of the petition, and had not provided a complete itinerary. The director noted that the petitioner must establish eligibility when the petition is filed not at a later date under a different set of facts. The director concluded that, without evidence of contracts and an itinerary, the petitioner had not established that it is the beneficiary's employer and that it met the definition of United States employer or agent. Moreover, the director determined that the lack of documentation pertaining to an actual work location where work existed for the beneficiary to perform rendered the LCA invalid. The director further determined that it was impossible to determine that the beneficiary would be employed in a specialty occupation based on the lack of contracts detailing the beneficiary's ultimate duties.

The director also found that the petitioner had made inconsistent and contradictory claims regarding its gross annual income, wages paid to its H-1B employees, and wages paid to the beneficiary, and determined that the evidence "strongly" indicated that the petitioner had not complied with the terms and conditions as shown on the Form I-129. The AAO will preliminarily review the director's comments regarding the petitioner's failure to comply with the terms and conditions of employment shown on the Form I-129.

Regarding the director's comments concerning the petitioner's failure to comply with the terms and conditions shown on the Form I-129, the AAO notes the petitioner's claim on appeal that it listed an estimated figure for its gross annual income in 2007 on the Form I-129. The petitioner provides a copy of its Form 1120, U.S. Corporate Income Tax Return, for 2007 on appeal to substantiate that the estimated figure of \$10 million is accurate. The AAO observes that the 2007 Form 1120 shows the petitioner's gross annual income is approximately \$10 million and that its taxable income for the 2007 year is \$67,565. The AAO finds no fault with the petitioner for providing an estimated figure on the Form I-129 for its gross annual income when the petition was filed and withdraws the director's comments regarding the petitioner's gross annual income.

Additionally, the director found that the petitioner's office is actually a virtual office shared with another company and questioned whether the petitioner had sufficient physical premises for their claimed combined number of employees. The AAO notes that the petitioner submitted a new lease, valid from September 1, 2008 to March 31, 2009, on appeal. The lease submitted on appeal lists the petitioner as the lessee and is only for Suite 54, a space of 1,646 square feet. The AAO observes that the lease submitted on appeal still does not appear to have sufficient physical premises for the petitioner's claimed number of employees. This limited amount of office space accentuates the fact that the petitioner cannot employ the majority of its workforce at this location and that it must operate as a contracting company that places H-1B beneficiaries in various locations. Thus the director's comments with regard to this part of this issue appear reasonably justified and will not be disturbed.

Further, the director noted that the petitioner filed an extraordinarily high number of petitions in relation to the number of employees it claimed on its petition and that it did not appear that the petitioner's H-1B employees were working for the petitioner pursuant to the original terms of

employment. The AAO notes that voluminous documentation pertaining to the petitioner's H-1B beneficiaries was submitted into the record. The AAO also notes the petitioner's explanation on appeal that it files a high number of H-1B petitions because of the high competition among companies in the IT sector looking for qualified personnel and that many of its employees transfer to other companies. Absent full details regarding the circumstances surrounding the employment of each of the petitioner's H-1B employees and the petitioner's complete personnel records regarding each of these beneficiaries, the record does not include sufficient evidence to determine whether the petitioner compensated each beneficiary as shown on the LCA pertinent to each beneficiary. That being said, the AAO agrees that the number of petitions filed by this petitioner under its name and that of its sister company raise concerns regarding the legitimacy of the H-1B petitions. Although the record in this matter is insufficient to determine that the petitioner failed to comply with the terms and conditions of employment of other beneficiaries in other petitions, the AAO observes that again the director's findings are reasonably justified; thus, the AAO will not disturb the director's decision with regard to this issue.¹

The director also found that the beneficiary's Forms W-2, Wage and Tax Statements for 2006 (\$29,356) and 2007 (\$18,859) did not reflect that the beneficiary had been paid the \$50,000 listed as his salary on the current petition.² On appeal, the petitioner asserts that the beneficiary took unpaid leave at times and that it had fully compensated the beneficiary for his services under the regulations. The record in this matter does not include the documentation submitted in support of the beneficiary's previously approved petition. As such, the AAO is unable to determine the actual prevailing wage and the beneficiary's intended wage pursuant to the terms and conditions under the beneficiary's prior petition and LCA. The AAO observes, however, that the petitioner in this matter has not submitted documentary evidence to substantiate its claim that the beneficiary took unpaid leave or that it paid the beneficiary's salary as listed on the previously filed petition and LCA. Without documentary evidence to support the claim, mere assertions will not satisfy the petitioner's

¹ While the Department of Labor regulations at 20 C.F.R. § 655.731(c)(7)(ii) may permit the non-payment of wages by an H-1B employer "due to conditions unrelated to employment which take the nonimmigrant away from his/her duties at his/her voluntary request and convenience," this has no bearing on a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) determination regarding an alien's maintenance of status in the United States and a petitioner's compliance with DHS H-1B program requirements. In general, except in situations in which the Family and Medical Leave Act (29 U.S.C. § 2601 et seq.) or the Americans with Disabilities Act (42 U.S.C. § 12101 et seq.) may apply, DHS generally requires that the failure to carry on the specific activities for which the H-1B status was obtained constitutes a failure to maintain status and renders the alien immediately deportable and the employer in non-compliance with the H-1B program requirements.

² The AAO observes that the petitioner has indicated: that the beneficiary would be paid an annual salary of \$50,000 on the Form I-129 and in its initial offer of employment; that the beneficiary would be paid \$45,000 on the initially filed LCA; and that the beneficiary would be paid \$48,000 in the employment agreement signed by the beneficiary and in the second filed LCA. Although these figures are above the prevailing rate listed on the initially submitted LCA for the Arlington Heights, Illinois area, the disparate figures undermine the petitioner's claim that it had actual, definitive work for the beneficiary when the petition was filed.

burden of proof. Unsupported assertions do not constitute evidence. *Matter of Obaigbena*, 19 I&N Dec. 533, 534 (BIA 1988); *Matter of Laureano*, 19 I&N Dec. 1 (BIA 1983); *Matter of Ramirez-Sanchez*, 17 I&N Dec. 503, 506 (BIA 1980). The record does not include substantive evidence that the petitioner complied with the terms and conditions of employment of the previously filed petition. However, as the issue of compliance with the previously approved petition is not before the AAO, the AAO will not discuss this issue further in this decision.

The AAO now turns to the director's determination that the petition could not be approved based on the four other grounds set out in the decision. The AAO affirms the director's conclusions on these issues and finds that for these reasons the petition in this matter is not approvable.

On appeal, the petitioner emphasized: "that the petitioner is an agent performing the function of the employer." The petitioner asserted that the documentation submitted demonstrated that it has regular, systematic, and continuous operations and has the ability to support the number of workers it currently employs. The petitioner noted that when it filed the petition in January 2008, the beneficiary was engaged in in-house software development but that due to a change in the business scenario and needs of the client it was determined that the beneficiary would work at the client-site in Abbott Park, Illinois. The petitioner explains that is why it submitted a newly certified LCA as an itinerary of the services the beneficiary would be providing.

Upon review of the record and the information submitted on appeal, the AAO first addresses the issue in this matter of whether the petitioner established that it met the regulatory definition of an intending United States employer. Section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Act; 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii). Specifically, the AAO must determine whether the petitioner has established that it will have "an employer-employee relationship with respect to employees under this part, as indicated by the fact that it may hire, pay, fire, supervise, or otherwise control the work of any such employee." 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii)(2).

Section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b), defines an H-1B nonimmigrant as an alien:

- (i) who is coming temporarily to the United States to perform services . . . in a specialty occupation described in section 1184(i)(1) . . . , who meets the requirements of the occupation specified in section 1184(i)(2) . . . , and with respect to whom the Secretary of Labor determines . . . that the intending employer has filed with the Secretary an application under 1182(n)(1).

"United States employer" is defined in the Code of Federal Regulations at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii) as follows:

United States employer means a person, firm, corporation, contractor, or other association, or organization in the United States which:

- (1) Engages a person to work within the United States;

- (2) Has an employer-employee relationship with respect to employees under this part, as indicated by the fact that it may hire, pay, fire, supervise, or otherwise control the work of any such employee; and
- (3) Has an Internal Revenue Service Tax identification number.

Upon review, the AAO concurs with the director's decision. The record is not persuasive in establishing that the petitioner or any of its clients will have an employer-employee relationship with the beneficiary.

Although "United States employer" is defined in the regulations, it is noted that "employee," "employed," "employment," and "employer-employee relationship" are not defined for purposes of the H-1B visa classification even though these terms are used repeatedly in both the Act and the regulations, including within the definition of "United States employer" at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii). Section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Act indicates that an alien coming to the United States to perform services in a specialty occupation will have an "intending employer" who will file a labor condition application with the Secretary of Labor pursuant to section 212(n)(1) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1182(n)(1). The intending employer is described as offering full-time or part-time "employment" to the H-1B "employee." Sections 212(n)(1)(A)(i) and 212(n)(2)(C)(vii) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. §§ 1182(n)(1)(A)(i) and 1182(n)(2)(C)(vii). Further, the regulations indicate that "United States employers" must file Form I-129 in order to classify aliens as H-1B temporary "employees." 8 C.F.R. §§ 214.2(h)(1) and 214.2(h)(2)(i)(A). Finally, the definition of "United States employer" indicates in its second prong that the petitioner must have an "employer-employee relationship" with the "employees under this part," i.e., the H-1B beneficiary, and that this relationship be evidenced by the employer's ability to "hire, pay, fire, supervise, or otherwise control the work of any such employee." 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii) (defining the term "United States employer"). Accordingly, neither the legacy Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) nor U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has defined the terms "employee," "employed," "employment," or "employer-employee relationship" by regulation for purposes of the H-1B visa classification, even though the law describes H-1B beneficiaries as being "employees" who must have an "employer-employee relationship" with a "United States employer."³ Therefore, for purposes of the H-1B visa classification, these terms are undefined.

³ It is noted that, in certain limited circumstances, a petitioner might not necessarily be the "employer" of an H-1B beneficiary. Under 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(2)(i)(F), it is possible for an "agent" who will not be the actual "employer" of the H-1B temporary employee to file a petition on behalf of the actual employer and the beneficiary. However, the regulations clearly require H-1B beneficiaries of "agent" petitions to still be employed by "employers," who are required by regulation to have "employer-employee relationships" with respect to these H-1B "employees." See *id.*; 8 C.F.R. §§ 214.2(h)(1) and 214.2(h)(4)(ii) (defining the term "United States employer"). As such, the requirement that a beneficiary have a United States employer applies equally to single petitioning employers as well as multiple non-petitioning employers represented by "agents" under 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(2)(i)(F). The only difference is that the ultimate, non-petitioning employers of

The Supreme Court of the United States has determined that where federal law fails to clearly define the term “employee,” courts should conclude that the term was “intended to describe the conventional master-servant relationship as understood by common-law agency doctrine.” *Nationwide Mutual Ins. Co. v. Darden*, 503 U.S. 318, 322-323 (1992) (hereinafter “*Darden*”) (quoting *Community for Creative Non-Violence v. Reid*, 490 U.S. 730 (1989)). That definition is as follows:

In determining whether a hired party is an employee under the general common law of agency, we consider the hiring party’s right to control the manner and means by which the product is accomplished. Among the other factors relevant to this inquiry are the skill required; the source of the instrumentalities and tools; the location of the work; the duration of the relationship between the parties; whether the hiring party has the right to assign additional projects to the hired party; the extent of the hired party’s discretion over when and how long to work; the method of payment; the hired party’s role in hiring and paying assistants; whether the work is part of the regular business of the hiring party; whether the hiring party is in business; the provision of employee benefits; and the tax treatment of the hired party.

Darden, 503 U.S. at 323-324; see also *Restatement (Second) of Agency* § 220(2) (1958); *Clackamas Gastroenterology Associates, P.C. v. Wells*, 538 U.S. 440 (2003) (hereinafter “*Clackamas*”). As the common-law test contains “no shorthand formula or magic phrase that can be applied to find the answer, . . . all of the incidents of the relationship must be assessed and weighed with no one factor being decisive.” *Darden*, 503 U.S. at 324 (quoting *NLRB v. United Ins. Co. of America*, 390 U.S. 254, 258 (1968).⁴

the H-1B employees in these scenarios do not directly file petitions.

⁴ While the *Darden* court considered only the definition of “employee” under the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (“ERISA”), 29 U.S.C. § 1002(6), and did not address the definition of “employer,” courts have generally refused to extend the common law agency definition to ERISA’s use of employer because “the definition of ‘employer’ in ERISA, unlike the definition of ‘employee,’ clearly indicates legislative intent to extend the definition beyond the traditional common law definition.” See, e.g., *Bowers v. Andrew Weir Shipping, Ltd.*, 810 F. Supp. 522 (S.D.N.Y. 1992), aff’d, 27 F.3d 800 (2nd Cir. 1994), cert. denied, 513 U.S. 1000 (1994). However, in this matter, the Act does not exhibit a similar legislative intent to extend the definition of “employer” in section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Act, “employment” in section 212(n)(1)(A)(i) of the Act, or “employee” in section 212(n)(2)(C)(vii) of the Act beyond the traditional common law definitions. Instead, in the context of the H-1B visa classification, the term “United States employer” was defined in the regulations to be even more restrictive than the common law agency definition. A federal agency’s interpretation of a statute whose administration is entrusted to it is to be accepted unless Congress has spoken directly on the issue. See *Chevron, U.S.A., Inc. v. Natural Resources Defense Council, Inc.*, 467 U.S. 837, 844-45 (1984).

The regulatory definition of “United States employer” requires H-1B employers to have a tax identification number, to employ persons in the United States, and to have an “employer-employee

Therefore, in considering whether or not one is an “employee” in an “employer-employee relationship” with a “United States employer” for purposes of H-1B nonimmigrant petitions, USCIS will focus on the common-law touchstone of control. *Clackamas*, 538 U.S. at 450. Factors indicating that a worker is an “employee” of an “employer” are clearly delineated in both the *Darden* and *Clackamas* decisions. 503 U.S. at 323-324; see also *Restatement (Second) of Agency* § 220(2) (1958). Such indicia of control include when, where, and how a worker performs the job; the continuity of the worker’s relationship with the employer; the tax treatment of the worker; the provision of employee benefits; and whether the work performed by the worker is part of the employer’s regular business. See *Clackamas*, 538 U.S. at 448-449; cf. *New Compliance Manual*, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, § 2-III(A)(1), (EEOC 2006) (adopting a materially identical test and indicating that said test was based on the *Darden* decision); see also *Defensor v. Meissner*, 201 F.3d 384, 388 (5th Cir. 2000) (determining that hospitals, as the recipients of beneficiaries’ services, are the true “employers” of H-1B nurses under 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h), even though a medical contract service agency is the actual petitioner, because the hospitals ultimately hire, pay, fire, supervise, or otherwise control the work of the beneficiaries).

It is important to note that the factors listed in *Darden* and *Clackamas* are not exhaustive and must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Other aspects of the relationship between the parties may affect the determination of whether an employer-employee relationship exists. Furthermore, not all or even a majority of the listed criteria need be met; however, the fact finder must weigh and compare a combination of the factors in analyzing the facts of each individual case. The determination must be based on all of the circumstances in the relationship between the parties, regardless of whether the parties refer to it as an employee or as an independent contractor relationship. See *Clackamas*, 538 U.S. at 448-449; *New Compliance Manual* at § 2-III(A)(1).

Likewise, the “mere existence of a document styled ‘employment agreement’” shall not lead

relationship” with the H-1B “employee.” 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii). Accordingly, the term “United States employer” not only requires H-1B employers and employees to have an “employer-employee relationship” as understood by common-law agency doctrine, it imposes additional requirements of having a tax identification number and to employ persons in the United States. The lack of an express expansion of the definition regarding the terms “employee,” “employed,” “employment” or “employer-employee relationship” indicates that the regulations do not intend to extend these terms beyond “the traditional common law definition.” Thus, in the absence of an intent to impose broader definitions by either Congress or USCIS, the “conventional master-servant relationship as understood by common-law agency doctrine,” and the *Darden* construction test, apply to the terms “employee,” “employer-employee relationship,” “employed” and “employment” as used in section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Act, section 212(n) of the Act, and 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h). That being said, there are instances in the Act where Congress may have intended a broader application of the term “employer” than what is encompassed in the conventional master-servant relationship. See, e.g., section 214(c)(2)(F) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1184(c)(2)(F) (referring to “unaffiliated employers” supervising and controlling L-1B intracompany transferees having specialized knowledge); section 274A of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1324a (referring to the employment of unauthorized aliens).

inexorably to the conclusion that the worker is an employee. *Clackamas*, 538 U.S. at 450. “Rather, as was true in applying common-law rules to the independent-contractor-versus-employee issue confronted in *Darden*, the answer to whether a shareholder-director is an employee depends on ‘all of the incidents of the relationship . . . with no one factor being decisive.’” *Id.* at 451 (quoting *Darden*, 503 U.S. at 324).

Applying the *Darden* and *Clackamas* tests to this matter, the petitioner has not established that it or any of its clients will be a “United States employer” having an “employer-employee relationship” with the beneficiary as an H-1B temporary “employee.”

To qualify as a United States employer, all three criteria at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii) must be met. The Form I-129 and the petitioner’s federal tax returns contained in the record indicate that the petitioner has an Internal Revenue Service Tax Identification Number. While the petitioner’s job offer dated January 16, 2008 indicates its engagement of the beneficiary to work in the United States, this employment letter merely outlines the beneficiary’s salary and benefits and provides an overview but no comprehensive details regarding the nature of the specific job offered or its location. The offer letter does not include the beneficiary’s signature signifying acceptance of the offer.

The AAO also reviewed the January 16, 2008 letter confirming the beneficiary’s employment with the petitioner which indicates that the beneficiary’s duties as a programmer analyst include: “Programming Designing, Planning, Consulting, Testing, Coding, Analysis, Development and new documents preparation etc.; and “other tasks suitable for Programmer Analyst and to which [the petitioner] may assign [the beneficiary].” The contract also includes the statement that “[the petitioner] will provide you with task-specific instructions for each task assigned to you.” Although this document was signed by the beneficiary and is dated prior to the date the petition was filed, the petitioner did not initially submit this document. The AAO questions the legitimacy of a material document dated at the time the petition was filed but submitted only in response to the director’s RFE. The AAO observes that a petitioner may not make material changes to a petition in an effort to make a deficient petition conform to USCIS requirements. *See Matter of Izummi*, 22 I&N Dec. 169, 176 (Assoc. Comm. 1998). Even if considering the employment agreement legitimate, the agreement does not establish the employer-employee relationship between the petitioner and the beneficiary. The record does not substantiate that the petitioner had specific projects for which the beneficiary’s services were required, had control over the beneficiary’s work product, or that any work assigned would be work performed by the worker as part of the employer’s regular business.

The AAO acknowledges the petitioner’s claim that its beneficiaries initially work in-house; however, the petitioner has not provided any work product or substantive evidence supporting its claim that it has ongoing in-house work or could accommodate the number of individuals for which it files petitions to work at its office location. The petitioner has not provided documentary evidence that supports its contention that it has regular, systematic and continuous operations and the ability to support the number of workers it currently employs. Going on record without supporting documentary evidence is not sufficient for purposes of meeting the burden of proof in these proceedings. *Matter of Soffici*, 22 I&N Dec. 158, 165 (Comm. 1998) (citing *Matter of Treasure*

Craft of California, 14 I&N Dec. 190 (Reg. Comm. 1972)). More importantly, the AAO observes that alien beneficiaries accorded H-1B status must have an actual job offer with a comprehensive description of the actual duties comprising the specialty occupation position and not be in the United States for speculative employment that has not been so defined.

The petitioner's late submission of an LCA certified by the Department of Labor on April 16, 2008, three months after the petition was filed and which changes the beneficiary's work location is evidence that the petitioner did not have a viable position in place when the petition is filed. The petitioner must establish eligibility at the time of filing the nonimmigrant visa petition. A visa petition may not be approved at a future date after the petitioner or beneficiary becomes eligible under a new set of facts. *Matter of Michelin Tire Corp.*, 17 I&N Dec. 248 (Reg. Comm. 1978).

The AAO has reviewed the letter signed April 17, 2008 by a representative of Abbott Laboratories, Inc. indicating that the beneficiary's contract is from March 14, 2008 to December 31, 2008, and that the beneficiary is currently working as an SAP SD Configurator/Analyst. This letter does not provide a comprehensive description of the beneficiary's duties or detailed information of the specific project the beneficiary would be working on. This letter does not represent a contract between the petitioner and Abbott Laboratories, Inc. and it does not sufficiently set out the beneficiary's duties, indicate who the beneficiary reports to, state who assigns and controls his work product, or provide definitive employment for the beneficiary for the requested employment period. In addition, as the director noted, this document did not exist when the petition was filed. Again, the petitioner must establish eligibility at the time of filing the nonimmigrant visa petition. *Matter of Michelin Tire Corp.*, 17 I&N Dec. at 248. The record does not include the underlying contract(s) that establish the beneficiary's ultimate services.

The AAO finds that the above documentation, even when reviewed in totality, does not provide sufficient details regarding the specifics of the job offered or the location(s) where the services will be performed. The AAO acknowledges the petitioner's claim that it is an SAP services provider, but we are unable to discern from the record, the nature of the beneficiary's purported duties while ostensibly located at the petitioner's offices. The record does not include information regarding specific projects, tasks, or other information regarding what the beneficiary will be working on. The record does not include any substantive evidence that the petitioner's regular business involves "analysis, design, programming and implementation of application systems." Again, going on record without supporting documentary evidence is not sufficient for purposes of meeting the burden of proof in these proceedings. *Matter of Soffici*, 22 I&N Dec. at 165.

Despite the director's specific requests in the RFE dated March 25, 2008 that the petitioner provide contracts between the petitioner and its end clients and a complete itinerary, the petitioner did not fully respond to the director's request. The regulations state that the petitioner shall submit additional evidence as the director, in his or her discretion, may deem necessary. The purpose of the request for evidence is to elicit further information that clarifies whether eligibility for the benefit sought has been established, as of the time the petition is filed. See 8 C.F.R. §§ 103.2(b)(8) and (12). Failure to submit requested evidence that precludes a material line of inquiry shall be grounds for denying the petition. 8 C.F.R. § 103.2(b)(14). Merely claiming in its letters in response to the

director's RFE and on appeal that the petitioner would be the actual employer of the beneficiary or an agent acting as an employer is insufficient. The record is without evidence of the actual work to be performed or other evidence to support the petitioner's claim that it has work to assign to the beneficiary. Similarly, failing to provide evidence of end contracts in effect when the petition was filed that substantiate that the beneficiary would be providing specialty occupation services precludes a finding of eligibility in this matter.

When discussing whether the petitioner was an agent, the director stated that the definition of agent at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(2)(i)(F) provides for two types of agents: (1) "an agent performing the function of an employer"; and (2) "a company in the business as an agent involving multiple employers as the representative of both the employers and the beneficiary." The director found that absent documentation such as work orders or contracts between the ultimate end clients and the beneficiary, the petitioner could not alternatively be considered an agent in this matter. The AAO reiterates that an agent functioning as an employer must establish that it has an employer-employee relationship as described above. The petitioner in this matter failed to substantiate that such a relationship existed. As stated above, going on record without supporting documentary evidence is not sufficient for purposes of meeting the burden of proof in these proceedings. *Matter of Soffici*, 22 I&N Dec. at 165. Furthermore, the AAO notes that an agent functioning as an employer must submit an itinerary. The AAO acknowledges the petitioner's indication that in this matter the LCA should be used as an "itinerary." However, an LCA does not specify the dates the beneficiary would be employed in the different locations and it does not provide a description of the beneficiary's services for each end user of the beneficiary's services. An LCA will not suffice as an itinerary of definitive employment. Finally, it is again noted that the petitioner did not have employment for the beneficiary in the "new location" until after the petition was filed. The petitioner submits no new evidence on appeal to support a finding that the petitioner is an agent. For this additional reason, the director's decision will not be disturbed.

The next issue is whether the petitioner submitted a valid LCA for all work locations, as required by 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(2)(i)(B). The director specifically noted that the LCA submitted with the petition listed only the beneficiary's work location as Arlington Heights, Illinois. The director properly did not consider the LCA submitted in response to her RFE, as the "amended" LCA was not certified prior to filing the petition. The Form I-129 filing requirements imposed by regulation require that the petitioner submit evidence of a certified LCA at the time of filing. A petitioner must establish eligibility at the time of filing the nonimmigrant visa petition. A visa petition may not be approved at a future date after the petitioner or beneficiary becomes eligible under a new set of facts. *Matter of Michelin Tire Corp.*, 17 I&N Dec. at 248. The petitioner failed to comply with the filing requirements at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(i)(B).

In addition, upon review, the AAO finds that the January 16, 2008 letter appended to the petition indicates that the petitioner has offices throughout the United States and the petitioner's response to the director's RFE confirms that the petitioner outsources H-1B beneficiaries. Absent end-agreements with clients in effect when the petition was filed and an itinerary of definite employment, USCIS is unable to determine the duration and location of work sites to which the

beneficiary will be sent during the course of the petitioner's requested employment period. Absent this evidence, the petitioner has not established that the initial LCA submitted is valid.

The next issue is whether the beneficiary will be employed in a specialty occupation.

It should be noted that for purposes of the H-1B adjudication, the issue of *bona fide* employment is viewed within the context of whether the petitioner has offered the beneficiary a position that is determined to be a specialty occupation. Therefore, of greater importance to this proceeding is whether the petitioner has provided sufficient evidence to establish that the services to be performed by the beneficiary are those of a specialty occupation.

Section 214(i)(1) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1184(i)(1), defines the term "specialty occupation" as an occupation that requires:

- (A) theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge, and
- (B) attainment of a bachelor's or higher degree in the specific specialty (or its equivalent) as a minimum for entry into the occupation in the United States.

The term "specialty occupation" is further defined at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii) as:

An occupation which requires theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge in fields of human endeavor including, but not limited to, architecture, engineering, mathematics, physical sciences, social sciences, medicine and health, education, business specialties, accounting, law, theology, and the arts, and which requires the attainment of a bachelor's degree or higher in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, as a minimum for entry into the occupation in the United States.

Thus, it is clear that Congress intended this visa classification only for aliens who are to be employed in an occupation that requires the theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge that is conveyed by at least a baccalaureate or higher degree in a specific specialty.

Consistent with section 214(i)(1) of the Act, the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii) states that a specialty occupation means an occupation "which [1] requires theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge in fields of human endeavor including, but not limited to, architecture, engineering, mathematics, physical sciences, social sciences, medicine and health, education, business specialties, accounting, law, theology, and the arts, and which [2] requires the attainment of a bachelor's degree or higher in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, as a minimum for entry into the occupation in the United States."

Pursuant to 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A), to qualify as a specialty occupation, the position must also meet one of the following criteria:

- (1) A baccalaureate or higher degree or its equivalent is normally the minimum requirement for entry into the particular position;
- (2) The degree requirement is common to the industry in parallel positions among similar organizations or, in the alternative, an employer may show that its particular position is so complex or unique that it can be performed only by an individual with a degree;
- (3) The employer normally requires a degree or its equivalent for the position; or
- (4) The nature of the specific duties is so specialized and complex that knowledge required to perform the duties is usually associated with the attainment of a baccalaureate or higher degree.

As a threshold issue, it is noted that 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) must logically be read together with section 214(i)(1) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1184(i)(1), and 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii). In other words, this regulatory language must be construed in harmony with the thrust of the related provisions and with the statute as a whole. *See K Mart Corp. v. Cartier Inc.*, 486 U.S. 281, 291 (1988) (holding that construction of language which takes into account the design of the statute as a whole is preferred); *see also COIT Independence Joint Venture v. Federal Sav. and Loan Ins. Corp.*, 489 U.S. 561 (1989); *Matter of W-F-*, 21 I&N Dec. 503 (BIA 1996). As such, the criteria stated in 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) should logically be read as being necessary but not necessarily sufficient to meet the statutory and regulatory definition of specialty occupation. To otherwise interpret this section as stating the necessary *and* sufficient conditions for meeting the definition of specialty occupation would result in particular positions meeting a condition under 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) but not the statutory or regulatory definition. *See Defensor v. Meissner*, 201 F.3d 384, 387 (5th Cir. 2000). To avoid this illogical and absurd result, 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) must therefore be read as stating additional requirements that a position must meet, supplementing the statutory and regulatory definitions of specialty occupation.

Consonant with section 214(i)(1) of the Act and the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii), USCIS consistently interprets the term “degree” in the criteria at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) to mean not just any baccalaureate or higher degree, but one in a specific specialty that is directly related to the proffered position. Applying this standard, USCIS regularly approves H-1B petitions for qualified aliens who are to be employed as engineers, computer scientists, certified public accountants, college professors, and other such professions. These occupations all require a baccalaureate degree in the specific specialty as a minimum for entry into the occupation and fairly represent the types of professions that Congress contemplated when it created the H-1B visa category. To determine whether a particular job qualifies as a specialty occupation, USCIS does not simply rely on a position’s title. The specific duties of the proffered position, combined with the nature of the petitioning entity’s business operations, are factors to be considered. USCIS must examine the ultimate employment of the alien, to determine whether the position qualifies as a specialty occupation. *Defensor v. Meissner*, 201 F. 3d 384.

The regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iv) provides that “[a]n H-1B petition involving a specialty occupation shall be accompanied by [d]ocumentation . . . or any other required evidence sufficient to establish . . . that the services the beneficiary is to perform are in a specialty occupation.” Moreover, the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iv)(A)(1) specifically lists contracts as one of the types of evidence that may be required to establish that the services to be performed by the beneficiary will be in a specialty occupation.

On the Form I-129, the petitioner stated that the proffered position is that of a “Programmer Analyst.” In the petitioner’s January 16, 2008 letter appended to the petition, the petitioner indicated the beneficiary’s responsibilities would include:

- Developing customer software for enterprise resource planning needs;
- Customizing functional modules on GUI mode like financial accountancy, material management, Human Resources management, sales and distribution and production planning[;]
- Coding in programming languages that suit the particular front end package;
- Writing algorithms required to develop programs using system analysis and design;
- Preparing flowcharts and entity-relationship models and diagrams to illustrate sequence of steps that program must follow and to describe logical operations;
- Using graphic files and text data from a database and presenting it on web;
- Collecting user requirements and analyzing coding to be done;
- Evaluating an existing system’s software, hardware, business bottlenecks, configuration and networking issues, understanding the client’s requests for enhancements and new business functions;
- Interface programming, debugging and executing of programs;
- Monitoring the database using backup, archive and restoring procedures.

Daily task activity would be as follows:

• System Analysis	25%
• System Design	20%
• Writing the source code and develop programs	30%
• Unit and System Testing	15%
• Implementation and Documentation	10%

The petitioner noted the beneficiary would develop tools and ERP packages and would work on client/server related web technology projects using particular programs and languages. However, the petitioner did not provide independent documentation to further explain the nature and scope of these duties. Noting that the petitioner, as a software development company, was engaged in an industry that typically outsourced its personnel to client sites to work on particular projects, the director requested documentation such as end-user contracts that provided a comprehensive description of the beneficiary’s proposed duties. Despite the director’s specific request for these documents, the petitioner failed to fully comply. The record does not include the scope and nature of work the petitioner’s client or client’s client requires from the beneficiary.

As discussed above, the record contains only a copy of a job offer to the beneficiary in letter form, an employment agreement that provides a general statement regarding the beneficiary's proposed duties but no description of the specific project to which the beneficiary would be assigned, and information that the beneficiary would be given task specific instructions at some point for each task assigned. Although the petitioner re-stated the beneficiary's duties in response to the director's RFE, the duties described are generic. The Abbott Laboratories, Inc. letter submitted in response to the director's RFE, even if considered timely,⁵ does not provide a comprehensive description of the beneficiary's proposed duties. The AAO observes that due to the wide range of skills required for many computer positions, there are many paths of entry into such positions including associate degrees, technical certificates, and general fields of study at the baccalaureate level. See the Department of Labor's *Occupational Outlook Handbook* on Computer Specialists.

To establish that a specific position in the computer field is a specialty occupation, the petitioner must provide evidence of the nature of the employing organization, the particular projects planned, and evidence that the duties described require the theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge attained through a baccalaureate program in a specific discipline. In this matter, the petitioner has failed to provide such evidence. Without evidence of contracts, work orders, in-house projects, or statements of work describing the specific duties the petitioner and the end use company require the beneficiary to perform, USCIS is unable to discern the nature of the position and whether the position indeed requires the theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge attained through a baccalaureate program. Simply going on record without supporting documentary evidence is not sufficient for the purpose of meeting the burden of proof in these proceedings. *Matter of Soffici*, 22 I&N Dec. at 165.

In support of this analysis, USCIS routinely cites *Defensor v. Meissner*, 201 F.3d 384 (5th Cir. 2000), in which an examination of the ultimate employment of the beneficiary was deemed necessary to determine whether the position constitutes a specialty occupation. The petitioner in *Defensor*, Vintage Health Resources (Vintage), was a medical contract service agency that brought foreign nurses into the United States and located jobs for them at hospitals as registered nurses. The court in *Defensor* found that Vintage had "token degree requirements," to "mask the fact that nursing in general is not a specialty occupation." *Id.* at 387.

The court in *Defensor* held that for the purpose of determining whether a proffered position is a specialty occupation, the petitioner acting as an employment contractor is merely a "token employer," while the entity for which the services are to be performed is the "more relevant

⁵ Even if the record did include more detailed statements, the evidence would not likely have been considered as it would not have pre-dated the filing of the petition. Again, the petitioner must establish eligibility at the time of filing the nonimmigrant visa petition. A visa petition may not be approved at a future date after the petitioner or beneficiary becomes eligible under a new set of facts. *Matter of Michelin Tire Corp.*, 17 I&N Dec. 248. The regulations at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(2)(i)(E) instead require that the petitioner "file an amended or new petition, with fee, with the Service Center where the original petition was filed to reflect any material changes in the terms and conditions of employment . . .".

employer.” *Id.* at 388. The *Defensor* court recognized that evidence of the client companies’ job requirements is critical where the work is to be performed for entities other than the petitioner. The *Defensor* court held that the legacy Immigration and Naturalization Service had reasonably interpreted the statute and regulations as requiring the petitioner to produce evidence that a proffered position qualifies as a specialty occupation on the basis of the requirements imposed by the entities using the beneficiary’s services. *Id.*

In this matter, the record demonstrates that the petitioner acts as an employment contractor. The job description provided by the petitioner, as well as various statements from the petitioner both prior to adjudication and on appeal, indicate that the beneficiary will be working on client projects and will be assigned to various client worksites when contracts are executed. The petitioner has not provided substantive evidence of in-house projects to which the beneficiary would be assigned or the work the beneficiary will perform. The petitioner’s personnel record shows it locates individuals in a number of different states to perform services. The petitioner’s failure to provide evidence of a credible offer of employment and/or work orders or employment contracts between the petitioner and its clients renders it impossible to conclude for whom the beneficiary will ultimately provide services, and exactly what those services would entail. The AAO, therefore, is unable to analyze whether the beneficiary’s duties at each worksite would require at least a baccalaureate degree or the equivalent in a specific specialty, as required for classification as a specialty occupation. Accordingly, the petitioner has not established that the proposed position qualifies as a specialty occupation under any of the criteria at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(A)(iii) or that the beneficiary would be coming temporarily to the United States to perform the duties of a specialty occupation pursuant to 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(1)(B)(1).

For the reasons set forth above, even if the other stated grounds of ineligibility were overcome on appeal, the petitioner has failed to supplement the record with sufficient evidence to establish that the beneficiary would be performing the duties of a specialty occupation, and the petition cannot be approved for this reason.

ORDER: The appeal is dismissed. The petition is denied.