



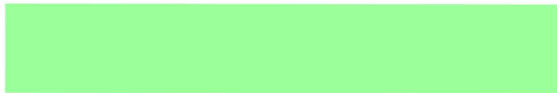
U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

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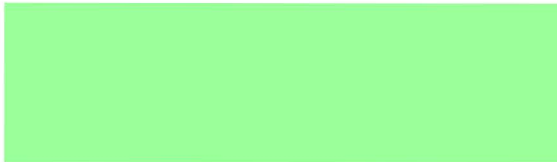
DATE: JUL 30 2014 OFFICE: CALIFORNIA SERVICE CENTER FILE: 

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:




INSTRUCTIONS:

Enclosed please find the decision of the Administrative Appeals Office (AAO) in your case.

This is a non-precedent decision. The AAO does not announce new constructions of law nor establish agency policy through non-precedent decisions. If you believe the AAO incorrectly applied current law or policy to your case or if you seek to present new facts for consideration, you may file a motion to reconsider or a motion to reopen, respectively. Any motion must be filed on a Notice of Appeal or Motion (Form I-290B) within 33 days of the date of this decision. **Please review the Form I-290B instructions at <http://www.uscis.gov/forms> for the latest information on fee, filing location, and other requirements. See also 8 C.F.R. § 103.5. Do not file a motion directly with the AAO.**

Thank you,

for 
Ron Rosenberg
Chief, Administrative Appeals Office

DISCUSSION: The service center director 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 visa petition, the petitioner describes it as a six-employee software development business¹ established in 2005. The petitioner filed this H-1B petition to classify the beneficiary as an H-1B temporary 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), in order to employ her in a full-time position that the petitioner identified by the job title "Programmer Analyst" and as being within the Computer Programmers occupational category.

The director denied the petition, concluding that the evidence of record failed to establish that the proffered position qualifies for classification as a specialty occupation.²

The record of proceeding contains the following: (1) the Form I-129 and supporting documentation; (2) the director's request for additional evidence (RFE); (3) the petitioner's response to the RFE; (4) the director's letter denying the petition; and (5) the Form I-290B, a brief, and supporting documentation.

I. STANDARD OF REVIEW

On appeal counsel indicates that the "preponderance of the evidence" standard is relevant to this matter. With respect to the preponderance of the evidence standard, *Matter of Chawathe*, 25 I&N Dec. 369, 375-376 (AAO 2010), states in pertinent part the following:

Except where a different standard is specified by law, a petitioner or applicant in administrative immigration proceedings must prove by a preponderance of evidence that he or she is eligible for the benefit sought.

* * *

The "preponderance of the evidence" standard requires that the evidence demonstrate that the applicant's claim is "probably true," where the determination of "truth" is made based on the factual circumstances of each individual case.

¹The petitioner provided a North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) Code of 541512, "Computer Systems Design Services." U.S. Dep't of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, North American Industry Classification System, 2012 NAICS Definition, "541512 Computer Systems Design Services," <http://www.census.gov/cgi-bin/sssd/naics/naicsrch> (last visited July 29, 2014).

² As indicated by the content of the decision, the director focused upon what she saw as insufficient evidence to establish the substantive nature of any work that had been secured for the beneficiary to perform for the employment period specified in the petitioner.

* * *

Thus, in adjudicating the application pursuant to the preponderance of the evidence standard, the director must examine each piece of evidence for relevance, probative value, and credibility, both individually and within the context of the totality of the evidence, to determine whether the fact to be proven is probably true.

Even if the director has some doubt as to the truth, if the petitioner submits relevant, probative, and credible evidence that leads the director to believe that the claim is "more likely than not" or "probably" true, the applicant or petitioner has satisfied the standard of proof. *See INS v. Cardoza-Foncesca*, 480 U.S. 421, 431 (1987) (discussing "more likely than not" as a greater than 50% chance of an occurrence taking place). If the director can articulate a material doubt, it is appropriate for the director to either request additional evidence or, if that doubt leads the director to believe that the claim is probably not true, deny the application or petition.

Applying the preponderance of the evidence standard as stated in *Matter of Chawathe*, we find that the director's determination that the evidence of record does not establish the proffered position as a specialty occupation was correct. The AAO conducts appellate review on a *de novo* basis. *See Soltane v. DOJ*, 381 F.3d 143, 145 (3d Cir. 2004). Upon our independent review of the entire record of proceeding, we find that the evidence of record does not establish that the proffer of a specialty occupation position is "more likely than not" or "probably" true. In other words, as the evidentiary analysis of this decision will reflect, the petitioner has not submitted relevant, probative, and credible evidence that leads us to believe that the petitioner's claim that the proffered position qualifies as a specialty occupation is "more likely than not" or "probably" true.

II. SPECIALTY OCCUPATION

We will now address the director's determination that the evidence of record has not established that the proffered position is a specialty occupation. Based upon a complete review of the record of proceeding, we concur with the director and find that the evidence fails to establish that the position as described constitutes a specialty occupation. Accordingly, the appeal will be dismissed, and the petition will be denied.

A. Statutory and Regulatory Format

To meet the petitioner's burden of proof with regard to the proffered position's classification as an H-1B specialty occupation, the petitioner must establish that the employment it is offering to the beneficiary meets the following statutory and regulatory requirements.

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 regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii) states, in pertinent part, the following:

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, a proposed 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 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 result, 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) must therefore be read as providing supplemental criteria that must be met in accordance with, and not as alternatives to, the statutory and regulatory definitions of specialty occupation.

As such and consonant with section 214(i)(1) of the Act and the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii), U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (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. *See Royal Siam Corp. v. Chertoff*, 484 F.3d 139, 147 (1st Cir. 2007) (describing "a degree requirement in a specific specialty" as "one that relates directly to the duties and responsibilities of a particular 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 occupations. These professions, for which petitioners have regularly been able to establish a minimum entry requirement in the United States of a baccalaureate or higher degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent directly related to the duties and responsibilities of the particular position, fairly represent the types of specialty occupations 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, and determine whether the position qualifies as a specialty occupation. *See generally Defensor v. Meissner*, 201 F.3d 384. The critical element is not the title of the position nor an employer's self-imposed standards, but whether the position actually requires the theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge, and the attainment of a baccalaureate or higher degree in the specific specialty as the minimum for entry into the occupation, as required by the Act.

B. Discussion and Analysis

As a preliminary matter, we will note our disagreement with counsel's suggestion that the director exceeded her authority by requesting relevant contracts between business entities involved in the beneficiary's assignment to work at a particular location for work for one of those entities.³

Pursuant to 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(9)(i), the director has the responsibility to consider all of the evidence submitted by a petitioner and such other evidence that he or she may independently require to assist his or her adjudication. Further, 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 regulations at 8 C.F.R. §§ 103.2(b)(8) and 214.2(h)(9)(i) provide the director broad discretionary authority to require such evidence as contracts and itineraries to establish that the services to be performed by the beneficiary

³ For instance, one of counsel's assertions in the Form I-1290B is that, per an unpublished – and therefore non-precedential – decision issued by us in 2000, the director's request for a work-site contract was unlawful.

will be in a specialty occupation during the entire period requested in the petition. A service center director may issue an RFE for evidence that he or she may independently require to assist in adjudicating an H-1B petition, and his or her decision to approve a petition must be based upon consideration of all of the evidence as submitted by the petitioner, both initially and in response to any RFE that the director may issue. *See* 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(9). The purpose of an RFE 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)(1), (8), and (12).

The AAO finds that, in the context of the record of proceeding as it existed at the time the RFE was issued, the RFE request for contract evidence was appropriate under the above cited regulations, in that the items sought addressed the petition's material absence of documentary evidence substantiating the petitioner's claim that it had H-1B caliber work for the beneficiary for the period of employment requested in the petition.

1. Failure to establish definite employment for the beneficiary

The Labor Condition Application (LCA) that the petitioner submitted in support of the petition was certified for use with a job prospect within the "Computer Programmers" occupational classification, SOC (O*NET/OES) Code 15-1131, and a Level I prevailing wage rate. The LCA also reflects that, as mentioned above, the petitioner assigned "Programmer Analyst" as the position's job title.

The petitioner described the proffered position and duties as follows:

[The beneficiary] will be employed as a Programmer Analyst with our company. His (sic) duties consist of the following: Assist with design, analysis, maintenance, documentation and testing of software code. Debug, test and document routing application program design and implementation. Create technical design documents, work with testing and release management teams for testing and implementation of the solutions in productions. Verify and validate the migration of the solution to production environment. Provide warranty support after the implementation.

The director found the initial evidence insufficient to establish eligibility for the benefit sought, and issued an RFE on August 2, 2013. The petitioner was asked to submit probative evidence to establish that it had sufficient specialty occupation work that was immediately available upon the beneficiary's entry into the United States through the entire requested H-1B validity period. The petitioner was also asked to establish that the beneficiary had a U.S. baccalaureate or its equivalent. In addition, the petitioner was asked to submit a detailed list of all Service file numbers for beneficiaries who have been approved using the certified LCA submitted with the H-1B petition. Finally, the petitioner was asked to submit evidence to establish the beneficiary's valid nonimmigrant status at the time the petition was filed. The director outlined some of the types of specific evidence that could be submitted.

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In response to the director's RFE, the petitioner submitted evidence of the beneficiary's valid nonimmigrant status. In addition, the petitioner submitted a statement confirming that the certified LCA submitted with the H-1B petition was not used for any other beneficiary. Moreover, an October 21, 2013 evaluation report from Foundation for International Services, Inc. was submitted, which opined that the beneficiary has the equivalent of a bachelor's degree in computer science and engineering from a regionally accredited college or university in the United States.

As for the director's request for evidence establishing that it had sufficient specialty occupation work that was immediately available upon the beneficiary's entry into the United States, the petitioner submitted a project description and copies of subcontractor agreements between the petitioner and Saicon Consultants, Inc. and Modis, Inc.

The petitioner described the project that the beneficiary would be working on as follows:

Development

A common app used by customers, sales persons and store manager (sic) in their day to day retail business. This app delivers a personal, engaging mobile experience which customers will love. This app can be customized to your unique brand identity- and can help you boost customer loyalty, transaction volumes, and conversion rates.

* * *

The development of this app requires knowledge and experience in SAP and other java and web based software programming and deep understanding of the software analysis, development, and testing. This app needs 1-5 people to develop the app that can be used primarily in SAP applications along with mobile devices. Once it is successfully tested on SAP platform the app can be deployed on other ERP and non-ERP applications.

The director reviewed the documentation and found it insufficient to establish eligibility for the benefit sought. The director denied the petition on November 18, 2013. The petitioner submitted an appeal of the denial of the H-1B petition. With the appeal, the petitioner submitted a brief and referenced exhibits.

As a preliminary matter, we concur with the director's finding that the evidence of record did not establish that the petitioner had filed the petition on the basis of definite, non-speculative work for the proffered position, for the period requested in the petition, that the petitioner had secured by the time that it filed the petition. On the Form I-129, the petitioner requested a H-1B classification for the period of October 1, 2013 to September 25, 2016. In response to the director's RFE, the petitioner stated that the beneficiary would be working on the [REDACTED] in order to fulfill the contract requirements of the petitioner, some of which were identified as Exhibit C.

To begin, the record of proceeding does not contain any detailed evidence of the project and associated job duties the beneficiary specifically would perform for the referenced project, [REDACTED]

Nor does the project description submitted identify the beneficiary in any way, her specific role in the project and the relevance of the proffered position to the project. Nor has the petitioner outlined the timeline for the project to establish that it has enough specialty occupation work for the beneficiary for the duration of the requested H-1B period.

Further, exhibit C contained a copy of a Subcontract Agreement between [REDACTED] and the petitioner, executed by both parties in April 2012.⁴ We find that the agreement between the petitioner and [REDACTED] that has been submitted into the record of proceeding does not establish the extent, if any, that the beneficiary would actually perform the services that the petitioner attributes to the proffered position. The [REDACTED] agreement does not present evidence of [REDACTED] client's requirements with sufficient specificity to show that the petitioner's performance obligations under the subcontract agreement would require the petitioner to fill and utilize the particular position that is the subject of this petition.

In this regard we have noted that the subcontract agreement indicates that "the terms of this Agreement apply in a situation where [the petitioner] agrees to provide resources to [REDACTED] for the benefit of a third party user client ("Client"). . . who has requested [REDACTED] to locate temporary staffing for the Client's project according to the training, skills, abilities and experience required by the Client. All projects or other work requested by [REDACTED] from [the petitioner] shall be separately negotiated and will be attached as an Exhibit to this agreement." None of the documents provided state that the petitioner's performance obligations under the subcontract agreement would involve the position proffered in this petition. Further, the subcontract agreement submitted into the record is not accompanied by any exhibits or other type of addendum that reflect what "project or other work" the petitioner is being contracted to perform.

As that subcontract agreement stands in the record, it does not evidence a contractual commitment to any particular services. On the other hand, we see that the subcontract agreement encompasses the possibility of a wide variety of possible services that might come within its Exhibits or related SOWs but yet not include the services that the petitioner states that the proffered position would provide. After all, not only does the subcontract agreement before us not mention the position that is the subject of this petition or its constituent services, but the subcontract agreement suggests that the client could be looking to the petitioner for a variety of "programming consulting services" not included within the scope of the proffered position. The suggestion resides in that "Whereas" purpose-related introductory phrase:

The parties desire to enter into an agreement for the furnishing of programming consulting services.

⁴ Exhibit C also contained a copy of a Subcontractor Agreement between [REDACTED], and the petitioner. This agreement is not signed by [REDACTED] and there is a lack of documentary evidence demonstrating that the parties agreed to the terms as stated in agreement. We thus accord it no weight.

In addition, there is no indication of the responsibilities, hours, location and duties that the beneficiary would have at Saicon or with the third-party user client engaged the beneficiary to work.

Thus, we conclude that the record of proceeding provides an inadequate factual basis for us to even determine that, at the time of the petition's filing, the petitioner had secured for the beneficiary definite, non-speculative work conforming to the petition's description of the proffered position.

USCIS regulations affirmatively require a petitioner to establish eligibility for the benefit it is seeking at the time the petition is filed. See 8 C.F.R. 103.2(b)(1). A visa petition may not be approved based on speculation of future eligibility or after the petitioner or beneficiary becomes eligible under a new set of facts. See *Matter of Michelin Tire Corp.*, 17 I&N Dec. 248.⁵ Moreover, the burden of proving eligibility for the benefit sought remains entirely with the petitioner. Section 291 of the Act. There is insufficient documentary evidence in the record to corroborate the availability of work for the beneficiary to perform the duties of the proffered position for the requested period of employment and, consequently, what the beneficiary would do and where the beneficiary would work, as well as what educational level of specialized knowledge in any specific specialty the beneficiary would have to apply to perform that work. The petitioner has thus not established that, at the time the petition was submitted⁶, it had located H-1B caliber work for the

⁵ The agency made clear long ago that speculative employment is not permitted in the H-1B program. For example, a 1998 proposed rule documented this position as follows:

Historically, the Service has not granted H-1B classification on the basis of speculative, or undetermined, prospective employment. The H-1B classification is not intended as a vehicle for an alien to engage in a job search within the United States, or for employers to bring in temporary foreign workers to meet possible workforce needs arising from potential business expansions or the expectation of potential new customers or contracts. To determine whether an alien is properly classifiable as an H-1B nonimmigrant under the statute, the Service must first examine the duties of the position to be occupied to ascertain whether the duties of the position require the attainment of a specific bachelor's degree. See section 214(i) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the "Act"). The Service must then determine whether the alien has the appropriate degree for the occupation. In the case of speculative employment, the Service is unable to perform either part of this two-prong analysis and, therefore, is unable to adjudicate properly a request for H-1B classification. Moreover, there is no assurance that the alien will engage in a specialty occupation upon arrival in this country.

63 Fed. Reg. 30419, 30419 - 30420 (June 4, 1998). While a petitioner is certainly permitted to change its intent with regard to non-speculative employment, e.g., a change in duties or job location, it must nonetheless document such a material change in intent through an amended or new petition in accordance with 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(2)(i)(E).

⁶ We note that the petitioner's letter submitted with the initial H-1B petition did not reference any specific project for the beneficiary. It was not until the petitioner's response to the director's RFE that the petitioner submitted the project description document entitled "SAP Mobile App Development" and stated that said document was a "description of the project to be undertaken by the beneficiary."

beneficiary that would entail performing the duties as described in the petition, and that was reserved for the beneficiary for the duration of the period requested. As this aspect of the record pertaining to the specialty occupation issue precludes approval of the petition, the appeal we will dismissed.

2. Additional evidentiary deficiencies requiring dismissal of the appeal

Aside from and in addition to the record's failure to establish that, at the time of the petition's filing, the petitioner had secured definite, non-speculative Computer Programmer work for the beneficiary for the employment period specified in the petition, we shall now discuss why the petition could not be approved even if the evidence of record had established that the petitioner had secured definite, non-speculative work which would require the beneficiary to perform the position duties as described in the record of proceeding.

Upon consideration of the totality of all of the petitioner's duty descriptions, position descriptions, explanations, and assertions, as well as the complete complement of documents submitted in support of the petitioner's specialty occupation claim, we find that the evidence in the record of proceeding does not establish relative complexity, specialization and/or uniqueness as distinguishing aspects of either the proposed duties or the position that they are said to comprise. 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'r 1998) (citing *Matter of Treasure Craft of California*, 14 I&N Dec. 190 (Reg. Comm. 1972)).

As evident in the list of duties quoted above, the record of proceeding presents the duties comprising the proffered position in terms of relatively abstract and generalized functions. They lack sufficient detail and concrete explanation to establish the substantive nature of the work and associated applications of specialized knowledge that that their actual performance would involve within the context of the petitioner's particular business operations. Take for example the following duty description for the beneficiary referenced in the petitioner's undated H-1B submission letter:

Assist with design, analysis, maintenance, documentation and testing of software code

The evidence of record contains neither substantive explanation nor documentation showing the actual, substantive scope of such assistance. Likewise, the record does not illuminate the substantive work and associated applications of specialized knowledge that would be involved in the referenced duties. Likewise, we see that the petitioner does not provide substantive information with regard to the particular work, methodologies, and applications of knowledge that would be required for "design, analysis, maintenance, documentation and testing of software code."

The duties of the proffered position, and the position itself, are described in relatively generalized and abstract terms that do not relate substantial details about either the position or its constituent duties. Further, we find that the petitioner has not supplemented the job and duty descriptions with documentary evidence establishing the substantive nature of the work that the beneficiary would

perform, whatever practical and theoretical applications of highly specialized knowledge in a specific specialty would be required to perform such substantive work, and whatever correlation may exist between (a) such work and associated performance-required knowledge and (b) a need for attainment of a particular level of education, or educational equivalency, in a specific specialty.

Thus, we conclude that, as generally described as all of the elements of the constituent duties are, they do not - even in the aggregate - establish the nature of the position or the nature of the position's duties as more complex, specialized, and/or unique than those of programmer analyst positions within the "Computer Programmers" occupational classification that do not require the services of a person with at least a bachelor's degree, or the equivalent, in a specific specialty.

We will now discuss application of each supplemental, alternative criterion at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) to the evidence in this record of proceeding.

We will first discuss the criterion at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(I), which is satisfied by establishing that a baccalaureate or higher degree, or its equivalent, in a specific specialty is normally the minimum requirement for entry into the particular position that is the subject of the petition.

We recognize the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) *Occupational Outlook Handbook (Handbook)* as an authoritative source on the duties and educational requirements of the wide variety of occupations it addresses.⁷

As noted above, the petitioner submitted an LCA in support of this position certified for a job offer with a "Programmer Analyst" title, within the "Computer Programmers" occupational classification. As the petitioner so designated the proffered position as falling within the "Computer Programmers" occupational category, we will analyze the position according to that category.

The *Handbook's* discussion of the duties of computer programmers states, in pertinent part, the following:

Computer programmers write code to create software programs. They turn the program designs created by software developers and engineers into instructions that a computer can follow. Programmers must debug the programs—that is, test them to ensure that they produce the expected results. If a program does not work correctly, they check the code for mistakes and fix them.

Computer programmers typically do the following:

- Write programs in a variety of computer languages, such as C++ and Java
- Update and expand existing programs

⁷ The *Handbook*, which is available in printed form, may also be accessed online at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh>. The references to the *Handbook* are from the 2014-15 edition available online.

- Debug programs by testing for and fixing errors
- Build and use computer-assisted software engineering (CASE) tools to automate the writing of some code
- Use code libraries, which are collections of independent lines of code, to simplify the writing

Programmers work closely with software developers, and in some businesses, their duties overlap. When this happens, programmers can do work that is typical of developers, such as designing the program. This entails initially planning the software, creating models and flowcharts detailing how the code is to be written, writing and debugging code, and designing an application or systems interface.

Some programs are relatively simple and usually take a few days to write, such as creating mobile applications for cell phones. Other programs, like computer operating systems, are more complex and can take a year or more to complete.

Software-as-a-service (SaaS), which consists of applications provided through the Internet, is a growing field. Although programmers typically need to rewrite their programs to work on different systems platforms such as Windows or OS X, applications created using SaaS work on all platforms. That is why programmers writing for software-as-a-service applications may not have to update as much code as other programmers and can instead spend more time writing new programs.

U.S. Dep't of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, 2014-15 ed., "Computer Programmers," <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/computer-and-information-technology/computer-programmers.htm#tab-2> (accessed July 29, 2014).

The *Handbook* states the following with regard to the educational requirements necessary for entrance into this field:

Most computer programmers have a bachelor's degree; however, some employers hire workers who have an associate's degree. Most programmers get a degree in computer science or a related subject. Programmers who work in specific fields, such as healthcare or accounting, may take classes in that field to supplement their degree in computer programming. In addition, employers value experience, which many students gain through internships.

Most programmers learn only a few computer languages while in school. However, a computer science degree gives students the skills needed to learn new computer languages easily. During their classes, students receive hands-on experience writing code, debugging programs, and doing many other tasks that they will perform on the

job.

To keep up with changing technology, computer programmers may take continuing education and professional development seminars to learn new programming languages or about upgrades to programming languages they already know.

Id. at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/computer-and-information-technology/computer-programmers.htm#tab-4> (accessed July 29, 2014).

These statements from the *Handbook* do not indicate that a bachelor's degree or the equivalent, in a specific specialty, is normally required for entry into this occupation. First, the *Handbook* specifically states that "some employers hire [computer programmers] who have an associate's degree." The *Handbook's* recognition that a bachelor's or higher degree is not exclusively "required" by employers, strongly suggests that a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or the equivalent, is not a normal, minimum entry requirement for this occupation. In addition, the *Handbook* does not support the assertion that at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, is normally the minimum requirement for entry into this occupation. Rather, the occupation accommodates a wide spectrum of educational credentials, including less than a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty. The *Handbook* continues by stating that employers value computer programmers who possess experience, which can be obtained through internships. Thus, the *Handbook* does not indicate that a minimum of a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, is normally required for this occupational category.

Further, with regard to the *Handbook's* statement that "most" computer programmers possess a bachelor's degree in a computer-related field, it is noted that the first definition of "most" in *Webster's New College Dictionary* 731 (Third Edition, Hough Mifflin Harcourt 2008) is "[g]reatest in number, quantity, size, or degree." As such, if merely 51% of computer programmer positions require at least a bachelor's degree or a closely related field, it could be said that "most" computer programmer positions require such a degree. It cannot be found, therefore, that a particular degree requirement for "most" positions in a given occupation equates to a normal minimum entry requirement for that occupation, much less for the particular position proffered by the petitioner. Instead, a normal minimum entry requirement is one that denotes a standard entry requirement but recognizes that certain, limited exceptions to that standard may exist. To interpret this provision otherwise would run directly contrary to the plain language of the Act, which requires in part "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." § 214(i)(1) of the Act.

Accordingly, as the *Handbook* indicates that entry into the Computer Programmers occupational group does not normally require at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent, it does not support the proffered position as satisfying this first criterion at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A). That is, in light of the *Handbook's* information on the range of acceptable educational credentials for entry into the Computer Programmers occupational group, a position's inclusion within this group is not in itself sufficient to establish that position as one for which a baccalaureate or higher degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent is normally a minimum requirement for entry.

Furthermore, the materials referenced by counsel from DOL's Occupational Information Network (O*NET OnLine) do not establish that the proffered position satisfies the first criterion described at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A), either. O*NET OnLine is not particularly useful in determining whether a baccalaureate degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, is a requirement for a given position, as O*NET OnLine's Job Zone designations make no mention of the specific field of study from which a degree must come. As was noted previously, we interpret 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. The Specialized Vocational Preparation (SVP) rating is meant to indicate only the total number of years of vocational preparation required for a particular position. It does not describe how those years are to be divided among training, formal education, and experience and it does not specify the particular type of degree, if any, that a position would require. Therefore, O*NET OnLine information is not probative of the proffered position being a specialty occupation.

When, as here, the *Handbook* does not support the proposition that the proffered position satisfies this first criterion of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A), it is incumbent upon the petitioner to provide persuasive evidence that the proffered position otherwise satisfies the criterion, notwithstanding the absence of the *Handbook's* support on the issue. In such case, it is the petitioner's responsibility to provide probative evidence (e.g., documentation from other authoritative sources) that supports a favorable finding with regard to this criterion. 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."

Although the petitioner asserts in his October 18, 2013 letter in response to the director's RFE that computer programmer positions are considered professional, and references on appeal that "[a]s per the Administrative Appeals Office (AAO) a Programmer Analyst is a specialty occupation," we note that copies of these allegedly approved petitions were not included in the record. If a petitioner wishes to have unpublished service center or AAO decisions considered by USCIS in its adjudication of a petition, the petitioner is permitted to submit copies of such evidence that it either obtained itself and/or received in response to a Freedom of Information Act request filed in accordance with 6 C.F.R. Part 5. Otherwise, "[t]he non-existence or other unavailability of required evidence creates a presumption of ineligibility." 8 C.F.R. § 103.2(b)(2)(i).

Again, the petitioner in this case failed to submit copies of these petitions and their respective approval notices. As the record of proceeding does not contain any evidence of the allegedly approved petitions, there were no underlying facts to be analyzed and, therefore, no prior, substantive determinations could have been made to determine what facts, if any, were analogous to those in this proceeding.

When "any person makes an application for a visa or any other document required for entry, or makes an application for admission, [. . .] the burden of proof shall be upon such person to establish that he is eligible" for such benefit. 8 U.S.C. § 1361; *see also Matter of Treasure Craft of California*, 14 I&N Dec. 190 (Reg. Comm'r 1972). Furthermore, any suggestion that USCIS must

review unpublished decisions and possibly request and review each case file relevant to those decisions, while being impractical and inefficient, would also be tantamount to a shift in the evidentiary burden in this proceeding from the petitioner to USCIS, which would be contrary to section 291 of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1361.

Nevertheless, even if this evidence had been submitted and even if it had been determined that the facts in those cases were analogous to those in this proceeding, those decisions are not binding on USCIS. While 8 C.F.R. § 103.3(c) provides that AAO precedent decisions are binding on all USCIS employees in the administration of the Act, unpublished decisions are not similarly binding. Moreover, if the previous nonimmigrant petitions were approved based on the same unsupported and contradictory assertions that are contained in the current record, the approvals would constitute material and gross error on the part of the director. We are 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'r 1988). It would be absurd to suggest that USCIS 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, our 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 nonimmigrant petitions, we 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).

Finally, it is noted that the petitioner submitted an LCA certified for a job prospect with a wage-level that is only appropriate for a comparatively low, entry-level position relative to others within its occupation, which signifies that the beneficiary is only expected to possess a basic understanding of the occupation.⁸

⁸ The *Prevailing Wage Determination Policy Guidance* (available at http://www.foreignlaborcert.doleta.gov/pdf/NPWHC_Guidance_Revised_11_2009.pdf) (last visited July 29, 2014) issued by DOL states the following with regard to Level I wage rates:

Level I (entry) wage rates are assigned to job offers for beginning level employees who have only a basic understanding of the occupation. These employees perform routine tasks that require limited, if any, exercise of judgment. The tasks provide experience and familiarization with the employer's methods, practices, and programs. The employees may perform higher level work for training and developmental purposes. These employees work under close supervision and receive specific instructions on required tasks and results expected. Their work is closely monitored and reviewed for accuracy. Statements that the job offer is for a research fellow, a worker in training, or an internship are indicators that a Level I wage should be considered [emphasis in original].

The proposed duties' level of complexity, uniqueness, and specialization, as well as the level of independent judgment and occupational understanding required to perform them, are questionable, as the petitioner submitted an LCA certified for a Level I, entry-level position. The LCA's wage-level is appropriate for a proffered position that is actually a low-level, entry position relative to others within the occupation. In accordance with

In this case, the petitioner has not established that the proffered position falls within an occupational category for which the *Handbook* (or other objective, authoritative source) indicates that at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, is normally the minimum requirement for entry into the occupation. Furthermore, the duties and requirements of the proffered position as described in the record of proceeding do not indicate that the position is one for which a baccalaureate or higher degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, is normally the minimum requirement for entry. Thus, the petitioner failed to satisfy the criterion at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(1).

Next, we find that the petitioner has not satisfied the first of the two alternative prongs of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(2). This prong alternatively calls for a petitioner to establish that a requirement of a bachelor's or higher degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, is common (1) to the petitioner's industry; and (2) for positions within that industry that are both: (a) parallel to the proffered position, and (b) located in organizations that are similar to the petitioner.

In determining whether there is such a common degree requirement, factors often considered by USCIS include: whether the *Handbook* reports that the industry requires a degree; whether the industry's professional association has made a degree a minimum entry requirement; and whether letters or affidavits from firms or individuals in the industry attest that such firms "routinely employ and recruit only degreed individuals." See *Shanti, Inc. v. Reno*, 36 F. Supp. 2d at 1165 (D.Minn. 1999) (quoting *Hird/Blaker Corp. v. Sava*, 712 F. Supp. 1095, 1102 (S.D.N.Y. 1989)).

Here and as already discussed, the petitioner has not established that its proffered position is one for which the *Handbook* reports an industry-wide requirement for at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent. Also, the record contains no letters or affidavits from firms or persons in the industry attesting to such a requirement. Further, there is no evidence of a professional association having made a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or the equivalent, a minimum requirement for entry.

Therefore, the petitioner has not satisfied the first of the two alternative prongs of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(2), as the evidence of record does not establish that a requirement of a bachelor's or higher degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, is common (1) to the petitioner's industry; and (2) for positions within that industry that are both: (a) parallel to the proffered position, and (b) located in organizations that are similar to the petitioner.

Next, we find that the evidence of record does not satisfy the second alternative prong of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(2), which provides that "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."

the relevant DOL explanatory information on wage levels, by submitting an LCA with a Level I wage rate, the petitioner effectively attests that the beneficiary is only required to possess a basic understanding of the occupation; that she will be expected to perform routine tasks requiring limited, if any, exercise of judgment; that she will be closely supervised and her work closely monitored and reviewed for accuracy; and that she will receive specific instructions on required tasks and expected results.

The petitioner's statements with regard to the claimed complex and unique nature of the proffered position are acknowledged. However, those assertions are further undermined by the fact that the petitioner submitted an LCA certified for a job prospect with a wage-level that is only appropriate for a comparatively low, entry-level position relative to others within its occupation. We incorporate here by reference and reiterate our earlier discussion regarding the LCA and its indication that the petitioner would be paying a wage-rate that is only appropriate for a low-level, entry position relative to others within the occupation, as this factor is inconsistent with the level of relative complexity and uniqueness required to satisfy this criterion. Based upon the wage rate selected by the petitioner, the beneficiary is only required to have a basic understanding of the occupation. Moreover, that wage rate indicates that the beneficiary will perform routine tasks requiring limited, if any, exercise of independent judgment; that the beneficiary's work will be closely supervised and monitored; that he will receive specific instructions on required tasks and expected results; and that his work will be reviewed for accuracy.

Accordingly, given the *Handbook's* indication that there are positions located within the "Computer Programmers" occupational category which are performed by persons without at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or the equivalent, it is not credible that a position involving limited, if any, exercise of independent judgment, close supervision and monitoring, receipt of specific instructions on required tasks and expected results, and close review *would* be so complex or unique that it could only be performed by a person with at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or the equivalent. Even more fundamentally, as discussed in detail above, the evidence of record does not establish that the proffered position possesses the relative complexity or uniqueness required to satisfy this program.

The petitioner therefore failed to establish how the beneficiary's responsibilities and day-to-day duties comprise a position so complex or unique that the position can be performed only by an individual with a bachelor's degree, or the equivalent, in a specific specialty.

As the evidence of record therefore fails to establish how the beneficiary's responsibilities and day-to-day duties comprise a position so complex or unique that the position can be performed only by an individual with at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent, the petitioner has not satisfied the second alternative prong at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(2) either.

We turn next to the criterion at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(3), which entails an employer demonstrating that it normally requires a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent for the position.

Our review of the record of proceeding under this criterion necessarily includes whatever evidence the petitioner has submitted with regard to its past recruiting and hiring practices and employees who previously held the position in question.

To satisfy this criterion, the record must contain documentary evidence demonstrating that the petitioner has a history of requiring the degree or degree equivalency, in a specific specialty, in its prior recruiting and hiring for the position. Additionally, the record must establish that a petitioner's

imposition of a degree requirement is not merely a matter of preference for high-caliber candidates but is necessitated by the performance requirements of the proffered position.⁹

Were USCIS limited solely to reviewing a petitioner's claimed self-imposed requirements, then any individual with a bachelor's degree could be brought to the United States to perform any occupation as long as the employer artificially created a token degree requirement, whereby all individuals employed in a particular position possessed a baccalaureate or higher degree in the specific specialty or its equivalent. See *Defensor v. Meissner*, 201 F. 3d at 387. In other words, if a petitioner's assertion of a particular degree requirement is not necessitated by the actual performance requirements of the proffered position, the position would not meet the statutory or regulatory definition of a specialty occupation. See section 214(i)(1) of the Act; 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii) (defining the term "specialty occupation").

As the evidence of record does not establish a history of the petitioner's exclusively requiring for the proffered position at least a bachelor's degree, or the equivalent, in a specific specialty, the petitioner has not satisfied 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(3).

Next, we find that the evidence of record does not satisfy the criterion at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(4), which requires the petitioner to establish that the nature of the proffered position's duties is so specialized and complex that the knowledge required to perform them is usually associated with the attainment of a baccalaureate or higher degree in the specific specialty or its equivalent.

In reviewing the record of proceeding under this criterion, we reiterate our earlier discussion regarding the *Handbook's* entries for positions falling within the "Computer Programmers" occupational category. Again, the *Handbook* does not indicate that a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or the equivalent, is a standard, minimum requirement to perform the duties of such positions; and the record indicates no factors that would elevate the duties proposed for the beneficiary above those discussed in the *Handbook*. As reflected in this decision's earlier discussion of the duty descriptions in the petitioner's letter of support, the proposed duties as described in the record of proceeding contain no indication of specialization and complexity such that the knowledge they would require is usually associated with any particular level of education in a specific specialty. As generically and generally as they were described, the duties of the proposed position are not presented with sufficient detail and explanation to establish the substantive nature of the duties as they would be performed in the specific context of the petitioner's particular business operations. Also as a result of the generalized and relatively abstract level at which the duties are described, the record of proceeding does not establish their nature as so specialized and complex as to require knowledge usually associated with at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or the equivalent.

⁹ Any such assertion would be undermined in this particular case by the fact that the petitioner submitted an LCA that had been certified for a Level I wage-level, which is appropriate for use with a comparatively low, entry-level position relative to others within the same occupation.

Additionally, we find that both on its own terms and also in comparison with the three higher wage-levels that can be designated in an LCA, by the submission of an LCA certified for a wage-level I, the petitioner effectively attests that the proposed duties are of relatively low complexity as compared to others within the same occupational category. This fact is materially inconsistent with the level of complexity required by this criterion.

As earlier noted, the *Prevailing Wage Determination Policy Guidance* issued by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) states the following with regard to Level I wage rates:

Level I (entry) wage rates are assigned to job offers for beginning level employees who have only a basic understanding of the occupation. These employees perform routine tasks that require limited, if any, exercise of judgment. The tasks provide experience and familiarization with the employer's methods, practices, and programs. The employees may perform higher level work for training and developmental purposes. These employees work under close supervision and receive specific instructions on required tasks and results expected. Their work is closely monitored and reviewed for accuracy. Statements that the job offer is for a research fellow, a worker in training, or an internship are indicators that a Level I wage should be considered [emphasis in original].

U.S. Dep't of Labor, Emp't & Training Admin., *Prevailing Wage Determination Policy Guidance*, Nonagric. Immigration Programs (rev. Nov. 2009), available at http://www.foreignlaborcert.doleta.gov/pdf/NPWHC_Guidance_Revised_11_2009.pdf (last visited July 29, 2014).

The pertinent guidance from DOL, at page 7 of its *Prevailing Wage Determination Policy Guidance* describes the next higher wage-level as follows:

Level II (qualified) wage rates are assigned to job offers for qualified employees who have attained, either through education or experience, a good understanding of the occupation. They perform moderately complex tasks that require limited judgment. An indicator that the job request warrants a wage determination at Level II would be a requirement for years of education and/or experience that are generally required as described in the O*NET Job Zones.

Id.

The above descriptive summary indicates that even this higher-than-designated wage level is appropriate for only "moderately complex tasks that require limited judgment." The fact that this higher-than-here-assigned, Level II wage-rate itself indicates performance of only "moderately complex tasks that require limited judgment," is very telling with regard to the relatively low level of complexity imputed to the proffered position by virtue of the petitioner's Level I wage-rate designation.

Further, we note the relatively low level of complexity that even this Level II wage-level reflects when compared with the two still-higher LCA wage levels, neither of which was designated on the LCA submitted to support this petition.

The aforementioned *Prevailing Wage Determination Policy Guidance* describes the Level III wage designation as follows:

Level III (experienced) wage rates are assigned to job offers for experienced employees who have a sound understanding of the occupation and have attained, either through education or experience, special skills or knowledge. They perform tasks that require exercising judgment and may coordinate the activities of other staff. They may have supervisory authority over those staff. A requirement for years of experience or educational degrees that are at the higher ranges indicated in the O*NET Job Zones would be indicators that a Level III wage should be considered.

Frequently, key words in the job title can be used as indicators that an employer's job offer is for an experienced worker. . . .

Id.

The *Prevailing Wage Determination Policy Guidance* describes the Level IV wage designation as follows:

Level IV (fully competent) wage rates are assigned to job offers for competent employees who have sufficient experience in the occupation to plan and conduct work requiring judgment and the independent evaluation, selection, modification, and application of standard procedures and techniques. Such employees use advanced skills and diversified knowledge to solve unusual and complex problems. These employees receive only technical guidance and their work is reviewed only for application of sound judgment and effectiveness in meeting the establishment's procedures and expectations. They generally have management and/or supervisory responsibilities.

Id.

Here we again incorporate our earlier discussion and analysis regarding the implications of the petitioner's submission of an LCA certified for the lowest assignable wage-level. As already noted, by virtue of this submission, the petitioner effectively attested to DOL that the proffered position is a low-level, entry position relative to others within the same occupation, and that, as clear by comparison with DOL's instructive comments about the next higher level (Level II), the proffered position did not even involve "moderately complex tasks that require limited judgment" (the level of complexity noted for the next higher wage-level, Level II).

For all of these reasons, the evidence in the record of proceeding fails to establish that the proposed duties meet the specialization and complexity threshold at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(4).

As the petitioner has not satisfied at least one of the criteria at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A), it cannot be found that the proffered position is a specialty occupation.

III. CONCLUSION AND ORDER

For the reasons discussed above, we conclude that the petitioner has failed to establish that it has sufficient work for the requested period of employment. In addition, the evidence of record does not satisfy any of the criteria at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) and, therefore, it cannot be found that the proffered position qualifies as a specialty occupation.

An application or petition that fails to comply with the technical requirements of the law may be denied by this office even if the service center does not identify all of the grounds for denial in the initial decision. *See Spencer Enterprises, Inc. v. United States*, 229 F. Supp. 2d 1025, 1043 (E.D. Cal. 2001), *aff'd*, 345 F.3d 683 (9th Cir. 2003); *see also Soltane v. DOJ*, 381 F.3d 143, 145 (3d Cir. 2004) (noting that the AAO conducts appellate review on a *de novo* basis).

Moreover, when we deny a petition on multiple alternative grounds, a plaintiff can succeed on a challenge only if it shows that we abused our discretion with respect to all of our enumerated grounds. *See Spencer Enterprises, Inc. v. United States*, 229 F. Supp. 2d at 1043, *aff'd*, 345 F.3d 683.

In visa petition proceedings, it is the petitioner's burden to establish eligibility for the immigration benefit sought. Section 291 of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1361; *Matter of Otiende*, 26 I&N Dec. 127, 128 (BIA 2013). Here, that burden has not been met. The appeal will be dismissed and the petition denied for this reason.

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