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FILE: WAC 07 190 51792 Office: CALIFORNIA SERVICE CENTER Date: **JUL 08 2009**

IN RE: Petitioner:  
Beneficiary:

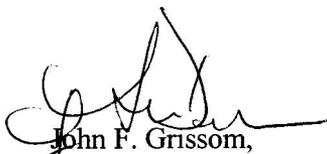
PETITION: Petition for a Nonimmigrant Worker Pursuant to Section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the  
Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b)

ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER:

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 AAO will dismiss the appeal.

The petitioner filed this nonimmigrant petition seeking to employ the beneficiary in the position of software engineer as an H-1B nonimmigrant 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). The petitioner describes itself as a computer consulting and software development firm and indicates that it currently employs more than 250 persons.

The director denied the petition because the petitioner failed to establish that: (1) it meets the regulatory definition of an intending United States employer as defined at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii); (2) it meets the definition of “agent” at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(2)(i)(F); (3) it submitted a valid labor condition application (LCA) for all locations; or (4) the proffered position is a specialty occupation.

On appeal, counsel for the petitioner submits a brief and additional evidence. Counsel contends: that the director erroneously found that the petitioner would not be the beneficiary’s employer; that the request for work orders, service agreements, and an employment itinerary is overly burdensome and against United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) policy; and that the director erroneously found that the LCA was not valid for all work locations and that the position is not a specialty occupation.

The petitioner filed a Form I-129 on June 8, 2007. When filing the I-129 petition, the petitioner averred in its May 30, 2007 letter of support that it is a “a drivers [sic] Information Technology organization committed to providing expert solution through multi disciplinary consulting, to our client’s business problems.” The petitioner further explained that it served a wide range of industries that includes manufacturing, accounting, telecommunications, multimedia and broadcasting, e-commerce solutions, and financial brokerage.

The director found the initial evidence insufficient to establish eligibility for the benefit sought, and issued a request for evidence (RFE) on July 24, 2007. In the request, the director noted that it appeared that the petitioner sought the beneficiary’s services to perform work for clients outside the petitioner’s work site and thus requested an itinerary of definite employment listing the location(s) and organization(s) where the beneficiary would provide services. The director specifically asked that the petitioner submit copies of contractual agreements between the petitioner and the beneficiary, copies of contractual agreements between the petitioner and the companies for which beneficiary would be providing consulting services, and copies of the statements of work, work orders and other documents or appendices to those agreements.

The petitioner provided a response dated October 17, 2007. In the response, the petitioner provided; an engineering services agreement dated June 29, 2007, between ASG Consulting, Inc. (ASG), a California based organization with its principal place of business in Pleasanton, California and the petitioner with its principal place of business in Edison, New Jersey; a purchase order for staffing services to the ASG agreement identifying the beneficiary as the “consultant” and the description of

services as VM Ware; and, an agreement between the petitioner and the beneficiary as “employee” dated May 30, 2007.

On January 3, 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 also noted that the agreement between the petitioner and ASG was dated subsequent to filing the Form I-129. The director concluded that, because the petitioner was a contractor, it was required to submit the requested end contracts and itinerary and, without this documentation, the petitioner could not establish that it met the definition of United States employer or agent.

The primary issue in the present matter is whether the petitioner has established that it meets 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.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, for purposes of the H-1B visa classification, these terms are undefined.

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

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<sup>1</sup> 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 H-1B employees in these scenarios do not directly file petitions.

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)).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> 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 (2<sup>nd</sup> Cir. 1994), *cert. denied*, 513 U.S. 1000 (1994). However, in this matter, the Act does not exhibit a 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 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, thus indicating that the regulations do not indicate an intent to extend the definition beyond "the traditional common law definition." Therefore, 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

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 (5<sup>th</sup> 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 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

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“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).

Finally, it is also noted that, if the statute and the regulations were somehow read as extending the definition of employee in the H-1B context beyond the traditional common law definition, this interpretation would likely thwart congressional design and lead to an absurd result when considering the \$750/\$1,500 fee imposed on H-1B employers under section 214(c)(9) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1184(c)(9). As 20 C.F.R. § 655.731(c)(10)(ii) mandates that no part of the fee imposed under section 214(c)(9) of the Act shall be paid, “directly or indirectly, voluntarily or involuntarily,” by the beneficiary, it would not appear possible to comply with this provision in a situation in which the beneficiary is his or her own employer, especially where the requisite “control” over the beneficiary has not been established by the petitioner.

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.”

On appeal, counsel for the petitioner asserts that it is in fact the employer of the beneficiary and asserts that the director’s conclusion to the contrary was erroneous. Specifically, counsel contends that based on the employment agreement and the agreement with ASG it submitted in response to the request for evidence, the petitioner met its evidentiary burden.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, it contends that the proffered position is a specialty occupation and that the LCA is valid.

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 indicates that the petitioner has an Internal Revenue Service Tax Identification Number. The AAO has reviewed the petitioner’s letter of support indicating its engagement of the beneficiary to work in the United States and the agreement between the petitioner and the beneficiary as “employee” dated May 30, 2007, and apparently signed by both the petitioner and the beneficiary which includes the general clause that the beneficiary “is being hired or retained by the Company for the purpose of performing duties summarized as Software Application Engineer for [the petitioner] with other duties that may be assigned by the company from time to time.” The AAO finds, however, that this documentation alone provides no details regarding the specifics of the job offered or the location(s) where the services will be performed. The record does not establish that the petitioner has the right to control the manner and means by which the beneficiary’s work product is accomplished. The record does not include any evidence that the petitioner’s regular business involves “VM Software.” Thus, the record does not include sufficient evidence to establish that an employer-employee relationship exists.

Despite the director’s specific request in the RFE that the petitioner provide contracts between the petitioner and the beneficiary, or between the petitioner and its end clients, the petitioner did not fully respond to the director’s request. The regulations state that the petitioner shall submit

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<sup>3</sup> Counsel also asserts that the director’s RFE was overly burdensome and the items requested were not required by the regulations or USCIS policy and that the director’s failure to understand a term used in the Exhibit “A” purchase order should have required the issuance of a second RFE rather than a denial using the lack of understanding the term as a basis for the denial. The AAO finds that counsel’s assertions are not meritorious in this matter. First, based on the petitioner’s type of business, the director necessarily required the information requested. Regarding counsel’s assertion on the director’s lack of understanding of a specific term, the director did not base the denial solely on the lack of clarity regarding the term; moreover, even if the director had committed a procedural error by failing to solicit further evidence regarding the term, it is not clear what remedy would be appropriate beyond the appeal process itself. The petitioner has in fact supplemented the record on appeal and the supplemental information does not change the outcome in this matter.

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).

The record reflects that in response to the RFE, the petitioner submitted an engineering services agreement dated June 29, 2007, between ASG Consulting, Inc. (ASG), a California based organization with its principal place of business in Pleasanton, California and the petitioner with its principal place of business in Edison, New Jersey. As the director observed this agreement was entered into subsequent to filing the Form I-129 petition. The AAO finds that the petitioner must establish that the proposed work existed when the petition was 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). In addition, the record is unclear whether the beneficiary would perform work for ASG or for ASG's client(s).

The minimal information contained in the May 30, 2007 letter of support and the incomplete information reflected in the employment agreement and subcontract agreement is insufficient to show that a valid employment agreement or credible offer of employment existed between the petitioner and the beneficiary at the time the petition was filed. The petitioner does not detail the work the beneficiary will perform in the employment agreement but rather indicates, generally, that the work will be that of a "software application engineer" and other duties as assigned. When considering whether the petitioner has the right to control the manner and means by which the product is accomplished, the AAO finds that the petitioner does not have this right, as set out in the engineering agreement between the petitioner and ASG. Absent evidence pertaining specifically to the requested validity period of this petition and the petitioner's right to control the beneficiary's work, the AAO is prohibited from concluding that the petitioner would be the beneficiary's employer. 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)).

Therefore, based on the tests outlined above, the petitioner has not established that it or any of its clients is a "United States employer" having an "employer-employee relationship" with the beneficiary as an H-1B temporary "employee" when the petition was filed. 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii).

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 again that, absent documentation such as work orders or contracts or an itinerary, the petitioner could not be considered an agent in this matter. 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.

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 listed the beneficiary's work location as Fremont, California. In reviewing the petitioner's supporting documentation, the director found that the petitioner's contract and purchase order indicated that the petitioner had contracted with another computer consulting/staffing agency to provide computer related services but that the record did not include the name or location of the final end-client firm that would utilize the beneficiary's services. The director concluded that without the final end-client agreements, the actual work location(s) for the beneficiary could not be determined. On appeal, counsel for the petitioner asserts that it did submit a valid LCA, as the LCA is for Fremont, California where ASG is located.

Upon review, the AAO concurs with the director's finding. Absent end-user agreements with the petitioner's client or in this matter the petitioner's client's clients, the duration and location of work sites to which the beneficiary will be sent during the course of the proposed employment cannot be determined. Absent this evidence, the AAO cannot conclude that the LCA submitted is valid for the beneficiary's intended work locations. For this additional reason, the petition may not be approved.

The final 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 viewed as a specialty occupation. Of greater importance to this proceeding, therefore, 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 Immigration and Nationality Act (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.

Pursuant to 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii):

*Specialty occupation* means an occupation which requires theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge in field 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.

Pursuant to 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A), to qualify as a specialty occupation, the position must 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 are 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 (5<sup>th</sup> 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), 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. 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.

In addressing whether the proffered position is a specialty occupation, the record is devoid of any documentary evidence as to where and for whom the beneficiary would be performing his services, and whether his services would be that of an actual software applications engineer.

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.

The petitioner’s letter of support dated May 30, 2007 provided a vague overview of the beneficiary’s proposed duties. Specifically, the petitioner stated:

[The beneficiary] will be required to perform design, development and implementation of application and client/server software, he will be responsible for [b]usiness analysis, testing, environment set-up, training of end users, generation of progress report and time sheets and participation in project meetings etc. In addition, he will be assigned to code modules and sub modules.

The purchase order attached to the agreement between the petitioner and ASG indicates that the beneficiary’s duties will involve “VM Ware.” On appeal, counsel asserts that as VM Ware, Inc. designs computer software applications, many of its employees would be computer software engineers. Counsel extrapolates from this assertion that “[a]s a result, any work to be performed by the Beneficiary at ASC [sic] related to the design of VM Ware, Inc.’s product(s) would involve duties of a computer software engineer.” Counsel does not describe the actual work to be performed and moreover, without documentary evidence to support the claim, the assertions of counsel will not satisfy the petitioner’s burden of proof. The unsupported assertions of counsel 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).

Upon review of the evidence, the AAO concurs with the director’s findings. As observed above, the employment agreement offered in support of the petition indicates the beneficiary “is being hired or retained by the Company for the purpose of performing duties summarized as Software Application Engineer for [the petitioner] with other duties that may be assigned by the company from time to time.” This statement suggests that the beneficiary will perform some work directly for the petitioner, yet the agreement between the petitioner and ASG indicates that the beneficiary’s duties will involve “VM Ware” and a page from ASG’s website indicates that in November 2006, ASG signed an “agreement with VM Ware to supply resources for Siebel up gradation Project.” The indefinite information regarding who the beneficiary will actually perform work for and the references to a variety of clients and clients’ clients renders it necessary to examine the ultimate end

clients of the petitioner to identify and determine the exact nature and scope of the beneficiary's duties for each client, whether it is ASG, VM Ware, Inc., or another third party, since it is logical to conclude that the services provided to one client may differ vastly from the services provided to another.

As discussed above, the record contains simply the letter of support which outlines the proposed duties of the beneficiary, and the deficient purchase order which provides no information regarding the end-clients and their requirements for the beneficiary. Without evidence of contracts, work orders, or statements of work describing the duties the beneficiary would perform and for whom, the petitioner fails to establish that the duties that the beneficiary would perform are those of a specialty occupation. Providing a generic job description that speculates what the beneficiary may or may not do at each worksite is insufficient. 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 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 *Defensor*, the court found that that evidence of the client companies' job requirements is critical if the work is to be performed for entities other than the petitioner. *Id.*

In this matter, it is unclear whether the petitioner will be an employer or will act 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 clients' worksites as necessary. Despite the director's specific request for documentation to establish the ultimate location(s) of the beneficiary's employment, the petitioner failed to comply prior to the adjudication of the petition. The petitioner's failure to provide evidence of an employer-employee relationship and/or descriptive work orders or current 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, cannot 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)(iii)(A) 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.

In visa petition proceedings, the burden of proving eligibility for the benefit sought remains entirely with the petitioner. Section 291 of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1361. Here, that burden has not been met.

**ORDER:** The director's decision is affirmed. The petition is denied.