

identifying data deleted to
prevent clearly unwarranted
invasion of personal privacy

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



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

PUBLIC COPY

b2



FILE: EAC 07 144 51942 Office: VERMONT SERVICE CENTER

Date: JUL 27 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 V. Grissom
Acting Chief, Administrative Appeals Office

DISCUSSION: The service center director denied the immigrant 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.

The petitioner is a software development, consulting, and training company that seeks to employ the beneficiary as a programmer-analyst. The petitioner, therefore, endeavors to classify the beneficiary as a nonimmigrant worker in a specialty occupation pursuant to section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the Act), 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b).

In the paragraph summarizing the bases of his decision to deny the petition, the director states, in pertinent part, the following:

USCIS [U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services] . . . must conclude that the petitioner does not qualify as an [H-1B] employer as they failed to provide evidence to establish that they have sufficient work and resources. The beneficiary is therefore not eligible for the requested H-1B visa because the petitioner is unable or unwilling to provide qualifying employment

At the outset of its analysis, based upon its review of the totality of the record including the additional documentation submitted on appeal, the AAO withdraws several findings of the director because they are not established by the evidence of record before the AAO. Specifically, the AAO withdraws the following findings: that the petitioner has not established that it had sufficient income to employ the number of people that it claims as employees on the Form I-129; that the petitioner appears to have been “benching” H-1B employees, that is, not paying them for time not working on projects; and that a “number of material discrepancies” indicate that “employment with [the petitioner] may not be regular and will not in practice garner petitioner’s employees a regular wage.” This action by the AAO is based solely upon the limited content of the evidence before it, which is not sufficient to establish whether or not the petitioner has been violating its obligations under the labor condition applications (LCA) certified by the Department of Labor.

The AAO also withdraws that part of the director’s decision denying the petition “in accordance with 8 C.F.R. [§] 214.2(h)(4)(D)(5) and 8 C.F.R. [§] 214.2(h)(11)(ii).” The regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(D)(5), which deals with USCIS’s assessment of a beneficiary’s qualifications to serve in a specialty occupation position, is not relevant, as the beneficiary’s qualifications were not a subject of the director’s decision. The regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(11)(ii) is also not relevant, as it deals only with the grounds for automatic revocation of approval of a petition.

The AAO also notes that, contrary to the assertions of counsel on appeal, the director expressly stated that it appeared as though the petitioner qualified as an “employer” entity eligible to file the petition. A close reading of the decision reveals that the employment aspect with which the director took issue is the petitioner’s claim to have H-1B caliber work for the beneficiary.

Remaining is the issue of whether the director was correct in his determination that the petitioner had not provided sufficient evidence to establish that it would be employing the beneficiary in a specialty occupation position. The director articulated this determination most clearly in the following paragraphs discussing the lack of documentary evidence of H-1B caliber work for the beneficiary:

The evidence of [the] petitioner's offer of employment contained in the record does not satisfy 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(1)(B) as the agreement does not cover the entire period of requested employment except indirectly by implication. There are no additional contracts, work orders, master service agreements or statements of work establishing the specific dates and locations of the beneficiary's proposed employment. The record also contains no evidence to demonstrate that a work itinerary existed for the position at the time the petition was filed. The submitted Labor Condition Application specifies only Chantilly, VA as the work location for the beneficiary.

As the record does not contain documentation that establishes the specific duties the beneficiary would perform, USCIS cannot properly analyze whether these duties would require at least a baccalaureate degree or the equivalent in a specific specialty or field of endeavor, as required for classification as a specialty occupation. Accordingly, the petitioner has not established that the proposed position qualifies for classification as a specialty occupation under the criteria at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) or that the beneficiary would be coming to the United States to perform the duties of a specialty occupation pursuant to 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A).

The AAO finds that the director was correct in his determination that the record before him failed to establish a specialty occupation position, and it also finds that the matters submitted on appeal have not remedied that failure. Accordingly, the director's decision to deny the petition shall not be disturbed. The AAO bases its decision upon its review of the entire record of proceedings, which includes: (1) the petitioner's Form I-129 and the supporting documentation filed with it; (2) the director's request for additional evidence (RFE); (3) the response to the RFE; (4) the director's denial letter; and (5) the Form I-290B and counsel's brief and attached exhibits in support of the appeal.

Section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b), provides a nonimmigrant classification for aliens who are coming temporarily to the United States to perform services in 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, a proposed 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 is so specialized and complex that knowledge required to perform the duties is usually associated with the attainment of a baccalaureate or higher degree.

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

Meissner, 201 F.3d 384, 387 (5th Cir. 2000). To avoid this illogical and absurd result, 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) must therefore be read as stating additional requirements that a position must meet, supplementing the statutory and regulatory definitions of specialty occupation.

Consonant with section 214(i)(1) of the Act and the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii), 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 documentary evidence as to where and for whom the beneficiary would be performing his services, and therefore whether his services would actually be those of a programmer-analyst, and the petitioner’s testimonial evidence is insufficient, given the inconsistencies contained in such evidence.

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. However, no independent documentation to further explain the nature and scope of these duties, beyond the petitioner’s insufficient testimonial evidence, was submitted. Also, the AAO notes that the petitioner is engaged in an industry that typically outsources its personnel to client sites to work on particular projects, and the contract between IEA and the petitioner indicates that IEA is going to sublease one-fourth of the petitioner’s office space during the term of the contract.

Although the record contains a contract and strategic relationship agreement between the petitioner and IEA, neither document mentions the beneficiary or lists his duties. 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. 158, 165 (Comm. 1998) (citing *Matter of Treasure Craft of California*, 14 I&N Dec. 190 (Reg. Comm. 1972)).

In support of this analysis, USCIS cites to *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 record of proceeding, as it existed at the time the petition was filed, indicated that the beneficiary will be working on client projects and will be assigned to various clients when contracts are executed. On appeal, the petitioner asserts that the beneficiary will work for one client, IEA. The record lacks evidence of a credible offer of employment and/or work orders or employment contracts between the petitioner and its clients, which 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 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)(I). Accordingly, the AAO finds that the director properly denied the petition on this ground.

Also, at a more basic level, as reflected in this decision’s discussion of the evidentiary deficiencies, the record lacks credible evidence that when the petitioner filed the petition the petitioner had secured work of any type for the beneficiary to perform during the requested period of employment. 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)(12). 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). For this reason also, the appeal will be denied.

Finally, the AAO turns to the director's determination that the beneficiary is unqualified to perform the duties of the proposed position. Although the director made that determination, counsel has elected not to rebut it on appeal. Accordingly, the director's analysis with regard to the qualifications of the beneficiary to perform the duties of the proposed position is affirmed.

The appeal will be dismissed and the petition denied for the above stated reasons, with each considered as an independent and alternative basis for the decision. 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 appeal is dismissed. The petition is denied.