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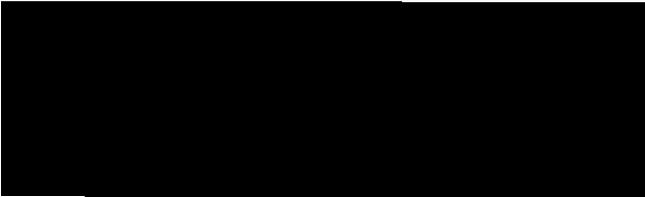
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Administrative Appeals Office MS 2090
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**U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services**

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FILE: WAC 07 150 50704 Office: CALIFORNIA SERVICE CENTER Date: JUN 04 2009

IN RE: Petitioner:
Beneficiary:



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

ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER: SELF-REPRESENTED

INSTRUCTIONS:

This is the decision of the Administrative Appeals Office in your case. All documents have been returned to the office that originally decided your case. Any further inquiry must be made to that office.

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

John F. Grissom
Acting Chief, Administrative Appeals Office

DISCUSSION: The nonimmigrant visa petition was denied by the service center director, 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 and consulting company that seeks to employ the beneficiary as a systems administrator. 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).

The director denied the petition on September 27, 2007, noting that the petitioner had failed to submit evidence demonstrating that a credible offer of employment existed for the beneficiary. Specifically, the director found that, while the petitioner submitted copies of employment agreements and job offer letters, none of these documents identified the beneficiary as a party to the agreement. Therefore, the director concluded that there was no evidence that an actual employment agreement had been executed.

On appeal, the petitioner asserts that the director's basis for denial was erroneous, and contends that the petitioner satisfied all evidentiary requirements. On appeal, counsel submits new evidence in the form of a signed contract and offer letter between the petitioner and the beneficiary.

At the time of filing, the petitioner submitted the following documentation:

- A letter of support from the petitioner dated March 24, 2007;
- Form ETA 9035E, Labor Condition Application (LCA), which identifies the beneficiary's work location as Edina, Minnesota; and
- Copies of the beneficiary's academic credentials.

The director found that that the petitioner had not established that a credible offer of employment existed between the petitioner and the beneficiary, and issued a request for evidence on June 14, 2007. Specifically, the director's detailed request required the petitioner to submit documentation such as an overview of the petitioner's business and contractual agreements demonstrating the beneficiary's proposed employment with the petitioner.

In a response dated August 27, 2007, the petitioner submitted several documents, including employment agreements, employment offer letters, and subcontractor agreements with outside companies. However, all of these documents were either blank or were copies of agreements between the petitioner and other employees with their names removed. None of the documents submitted constituted an employment agreement, or offer of employment, between the beneficiary and the petitioner. Consequently, the director denied the petition.

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

To qualify as a United States employer, all three of the above criteria must be met. The Form I-129 and the petitioner's federal tax returns contained in the record indicate that the petitioner has an Internal Revenue Service Tax Identification Number. However, despite the director's specific request that the petitioner provide contracts between the petitioner and the beneficiary in the RFE dated June 14, 2007, the petitioner did not fully respond to the director's request. While the petitioner submitted documentary evidence in the form of employment contracts and offers of employment in letter form, these documents were not executed by either the beneficiary or the petitioner. As a result, the director correctly concluded that no credible offer of employment or employment contract between the petitioner and the beneficiary existed. 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).

On appeal, the petitioner contends that the employment agreements submitted clearly outline the terms of employment and indicated that the beneficiary would be an "at will" employee. It further contends that by virtue of submission of these documents, the regulatory requirements have been satisfied and the petition should be approved. The AAO disagrees.

The petitioner fails to address the fact that the boilerplate agreements submitted in response to the RFE and again on appeal do not identify the beneficiary as a party to the agreements. Pursuant to the regulations at 8 C.F.R. §§ 214.2(h)(4)(ii)(1) and (2), the petitioner must engage the beneficiary to work in the United States and have an employer-employee relationship with the beneficiary. The petitioner's reliance on agreements between itself and other employees is insufficient to establish this regulatory requirement.

The regulations state that the petitioner shall submit additional evidence as the director, in his or her discretion, may deem necessary. The purpose of the request for evidence is to elicit further information that clarifies whether eligibility for the benefit sought has been established, as of the time the petition is filed. *See* 8 C.F.R. §§ 103.2(b)(8) and (12). As stated above, the 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 petitioner was afforded the opportunity to submit contracts and other agreements demonstrating that a credible offer of employment was extended to the beneficiary and that an employer-employee relationship existed. The petitioner, however, failed to sufficiently respond to this request.

Despite the petitioner's assertions on appeal that it has submitted sufficient documentation and that it will employ the beneficiary in the proposed position, the petitioner failed to submit evidence in support of this claim. 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)).

The record contains no documentary evidence that a valid employment agreement or credible offer of employment exists between the petitioner and the beneficiary. Therefore, the petitioner has failed to satisfy the requirements at 8 C.F.R. §§ 214.2(h)(4)(ii)(1) and (2).

It is also noted that the petitioner asserts that U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has approved other H-1B petitions for the petitioner. The petitioner, however, merely submits a list of receipt numbers for these alleged approvals but provides no supporting evidence submitted to the service center in these prior cases. In the absence of all of the corroborating evidence contained in those records of proceeding, the documents submitted by the petitioner are not sufficient to enable the AAO to determine whether the other H-1B petitions were approved in error.

Each nonimmigrant petition is a separate proceeding with a separate record. *See* 8 C.F.R. § 103.8(d). In making a determination of statutory eligibility, USCIS is limited to the information contained in the record of proceeding. *See* 8 C.F.R. § 103.2(b)(16)(ii). Although the AAO may attempt to hypothesize as to whether a prior approval was erroneous, no such determination may be made without review of the original record in its entirety. If the prior petitions were approved based on evidence that was substantially similar to the evidence contained in this record of proceeding, or, rather, the lack of evidence in the current record, the approvals of the prior petitions would have been material or gross error. USCIS is not required to approve 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. 1988). Neither USCIS nor any other 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).

As related in the discussion above, the petitioner has not established that a credible offer of employment was available to the beneficiary at the time of filing and, therefore, has failed to establish that an employer-employee relationship exists or will credibly exist between the petitioner and the beneficiary. Accordingly, the AAO will not disturb the director's denial of the petition.

It must also be noted that for purposes of the H-1B adjudication, the issue of bona fide employment is viewed within the context of whether the petitioner has offered the beneficiary a position that is determined to be a specialty occupation. Therefore, of greater importance to this proceeding, although not addressed by the director, 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.

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 any documentary evidence as to where and for whom the beneficiary would be performing his services, and whether his services would be that of a systems analyst.

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)(I) 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 March 24, 2007 provided the following description of the beneficiary's duties:

The beneficiary's primary responsibilities include network administration and security measures in communications environment; Perform administration of high-end UNIX, Novell and NT systems and TCP/IP connectivity for LAN's and WAN's and for RDBMS and other applications; Manage and resolve problems in administration; Plan and supervise implementation of TCP/IP connectivity support and resolve stack issues for networked systems; upgrade and install hardware and application; as well as programming and scripting for network administration using C, C++, Java, ASP, VB, VB.Net, Javascript, HTML, XML, WML, Oracle, SQL, Novell Netware, Windows, UNIX and LINUX.

However, no independent documentation to further explain the nature and scope of these duties was submitted. Noting that the petitioner, as a software development company, was engaged in an industry that typically outsourced its personnel to client sites to work on particular projects, the director requested documentation such as contracts and work orders, documentation that would outline for whom the beneficiary would render services and what his duties would include at each worksite. Despite the director's specific request for these documents, the petitioner failed to comply.

As discussed above, the record contains an employment agreement, offers of employment in letter form, and subcontractor agreements with outside companies. However, these documents provided limited details regarding the nature of the beneficiary's proposed position and accompanying duties. Specifically, these documents were either blank or were photocopies of agreements between the petitioner and other employees, not the beneficiary. None of these documents constituted an employment agreement between the beneficiary and the petitioner. 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 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. Despite the director's specific request for documentation to establish the ultimate location of the beneficiary's employment, the petitioner failed to comply. Moreover, the petitioner's failure to provide evidence of a credible offer of employment and/or work orders or employment contracts between the petitioner and the beneficiary or 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)(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).

An application or petition that fails to comply with the technical requirements of the law may be denied by the AAO 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 Dor v. INS*, 891 F.2d 997, 1002 n. 9 (2d Cir. 1989)(noting that the AAO reviews appeals on a *de novo* basis). For the reasons set forth above, even if a bona fide offer of employment was found to exist, 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 additional 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 appeal is dismissed. The petition is denied.