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FILE: EAC 07 214 51771 Office: VERMONT SERVICE CENTER Date: OCT 13 2009

IN RE: Petitioner: [Redacted]  
Beneficiary: [Redacted]

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)

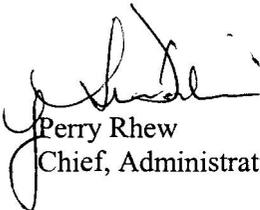
ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER:



**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).

  
Perry Rhew  
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.

The petitioner is a software consulting and development 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).

The director denied the petition on the basis of his determination that the petitioner had failed to establish that the proposed position qualifies for classification as a specialty occupation.

The record of proceeding before the AAO contains the following: (1) the Form I-129 and supporting documentation; (2) the director's request for additional evidence; (3) the petitioner's response to the director's request; (4) the director's denial letter; and (5) the Form I-290B and supporting documentation. The AAO reviewed the record in its entirety before issuing its decision.

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.

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

*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 (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), 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 proposed position is a specialty occupation, the AAO agrees with the director’s determination that the record lacks documentary evidence as to where and for whom the beneficiary would be performing his services for the entire period of requested employment, and therefore whether his services would actually be those of a programmer-analyst for that entire period of time.

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 filed the instant petition on July 17, 2007. In his December 26, 2007 request for additional evidence, the director requested, among other items, a detailed itinerary with the dates and locations of services to be performed, as well as a copy of the contract with the end user of the beneficiary’s services which specifically mentions the beneficiary and the duties he would perform for that end user.

The petitioner responded to the director’s request for additional evidence on February 7, 2008. The petitioner submitted, among other items, a March 31, 2006 subcontractor agreement between the petitioner and Idea Integration Corporation (Idea), as well as a March 31, 2006 statement of work issued pursuant to that agreement.

The petitioner also submitted a statement of work, signed by the petitioner and [REDACTED] on June 15, 2006, which called for the beneficiary to provide services for [REDACTED] between June 12, 2006 and September 12, 2007. This statement of work also called for the beneficiary’s service to [REDACTED] to cease on September 12, 2006.

The petitioner also submitted a March 20, 2007 staffing agreement between the petitioner and XL Global Services, Inc. (XL Global). However, no statements or work, work orders, or similar documents issued pursuant to that document were submitted by the petitioner.

In his April 10, 2008 denial, the director found the petitioner’s evidence deficient. The director found that since the record lacked documentary evidence as to where and for whom the beneficiary would be performing his services for the entire period of requested employment, it had failed to demonstrate the existence of a specialty occupation.

On appeal, counsel states that the beneficiary has been providing services for XL Global since May 12, 2006, and submits a May 12, 2006 work order issued pursuant to a May 12, 2006 agreement between XL Global and the petitioner. A copy of that May 12, 2006 agreement, however, was not provided.

The AAO finds the petitioner’s evidence deficient. Although the petitioner submits a description from XL Global regarding the beneficiary’s duties, the record does not establish that the beneficiary would be, or has been, providing his services to XL Global. The AAO acknowledges the petitioner’s submission of the May 12, 2006 work order indicating that the beneficiary would work for XL Global. However, as noted previously, the record also contains a June 15, 2006 statement of work, which called for the beneficiary to provide his services to [REDACTED] between June 15, 2006 and September 12, 2007. As the statement of work regarding the [REDACTED]

█ project post-dates the May 12, 2006 work order submitted by counsel on appeal, the AAO will not, absent clear explanation, accept the May 12, 2006 work order as evidence of an ongoing project with XL Global. It is incumbent upon the petitioner to resolve any inconsistencies in the record by independent objective evidence. Any attempt to explain or reconcile such inconsistencies will not suffice unless the petitioner submits competent objective evidence pointing to where the truth lies. *Matter of Ho*, 19 I&N Dec. 582, 591-92 (BIA 1988). As such, the documentation regarding the XL Global project does not constitute the existence of a specialty occupation.

The AAO agrees with the director's decision to deny this petition. The record contains conflicting information regarding the identity of the actual end-user of the beneficiary's services. As such, the record also lacks meaningful information regarding the actual duties proposed for the beneficiary from the end-user of the beneficiary's services. The AAO, therefore, cannot make a determination as to whether the proposed position qualifies for classification as a specialty occupation, as the record is devoid of clear information regarding his duties.

Moreover, even if such were not the case, the record would still be deficient, as it does not indicate that the petitioner has secured work for the beneficiary to perform during the entire period of requested employment (September 30, 2007 through September 29, 2010).

For all of these reasons, the AAO finds that the record fails to contain substantive evidence about any particular project on which the beneficiary would work during the entire period of requested employment. 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).

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 proposed 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.*

The petitioner's failure to establish the substantive nature of the work to be performed by the beneficiary precludes finding a specialty occupation under any criterion at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) because it is the substantive nature of that work that determines: (1) the normal minimum educational requirement for the particular position, which is the focus of criterion 1; (2) industry positions which are parallel to the proffered position and thus appropriate for review for a common degree requirement, under the first alternate prong of criterion 2; (3) the level of complexity or uniqueness of the proffered position, which is the focus of the second alternate prong of criterion 2; (4) the factual justification for a petitioner's normally requiring a degree or its equivalent, when that is an issue under criterion 3; and (5) the degree of specialization and complexity of the specific duties, which is the focus of criterion 4.

In accordance with its previous discussion, the AAO agrees with the director's determination that the petitioner has failed to establish that the proposed position qualifies for classification as a specialty occupation. Also, at a more basic level, as reflected in this decision's discussion of the evidentiary deficiencies, the record lacks evidence that when the petitioner filed the petition, the petitioner had secured work for the beneficiary to perform during the requested period of employment. Again, 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 must be denied.

The AAO maintains plenary power to review each appeal on a *de novo* basis. 5 U.S.C. § 557(b) ("On appeal from or review of the initial decision, the agency has all the powers which it would have in making the initial decision except as it may limit the issues on notice or by rule."). See also, *Janka v. U.S. Dept. of Transp., NTSB*, 925 F.2d 1147, 1149 (9th Cir. 1991). The AAO's *de novo* authority has been long recognized by the federal courts. See e.g., *Dor v. INS*, 891 F.2d 997, 1002 n. 9 (2d Cir. 1989).

The petition will be denied and the appeal dismissed 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.