



Office of Communications

**U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services**

USCIS Update

January 4, 2008

USCIS Extends Suspension of Premium Processing Service for Religious Workers (R-1) Nonimmigrant Visa Classification

WASHINGTON—U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) announced today that suspension of premium processing services for religious worker (R-1) visa petitions will be extended until July 8, 2008. A previous six-month suspension was announced on June 18, 2007.

The [Premium Processing Service](#) provides faster processing of certain employment-based petitions and guarantees a 15-calendar day processing time. USCIS needs additional time to assess whether it is possible to provide this level of service for nonimmigrant religious worker petitions. Due to the complexities with adjudicating R-1 visa petitions, USCIS cannot reasonably ensure a level of processing service within 15 calendar days.

On April 25, 2007, USCIS proposed significant revisions to its regulations related to the special immigrant and nonimmigrant (R-1) religious worker visa classifications. USCIS is currently considering comments on the [proposed rule](#) and promulgating the final rule. The proposed rule suggested steps to eliminate fraud in the religious worker program and discusses concerns addressed in an August 2005 Benefit Fraud Assessment conducted by USCIS' Office of Fraud Detection and National Security. That assessment revealed potential vulnerabilities in the religious worker program.

USCIS will continue processing R-1 visa petitions which include already-established procedures designed to ensure the legitimacy of the petitioner and statements made in the petition. The procedures may include inspections, evaluations, verifications and compliance reviews for religious organizations – procedures that exceed the 15-day guarantee for premium processing.

In the future, if USCIS is able to properly process these cases within 15 calendar days of receipt, the Petition for a Nonimmigrant Worker (Form I-129) requesting R-1 nonimmigrant visa classification may once again be available for premium processing services. Additionally, USCIS may prescribe additional conditions of availability on the Premium Processing Service for religious worker petitions.

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