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Immigration Update - USCIS Reorganizes Employment-based Adjudications

By Nancy-Jo Merritt

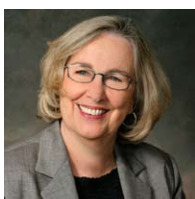
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has announced that the first phase of a new “centralized filing and bi-specialized adjudication” initiative goes into effect on April 1, 2006. Employers will now file all nonimmigrant work authorization petitions (Form I-129) at the Vermont Service Center, which will process all I-129s and related dependent applications beginning April 1, 2006.

Similarly, the Nebraska and Texas Service Centers will process all immigrant visa petitions (Form I-140) and related permanent residency applications (adjustment of status, travel permission, work authorization). Those applications will be filed at the Nebraska Service Center. The California Service Center has already begun mailing approximately 15,000 I-140 and I-485 cases to the Texas Service Center.

USCIS stated that “pairing work between Service Centers will allow USCIS to better manage cases and improve customer service.” The Service Centers have been directed not to reject any misfiled petitions or applications, but accept the filing and redirect it to the correct location, honoring the initial receipt date.

USCIS has indicated there will be no substantive changes in the adjudication of the petitions and applications included in the “bi-specialization” program. This is yet another move in the Department of Homeland Security’s efforts to increase the efficiency of its document-processing duties. Additional information is available by calling USCIS National Customer Service Center toll-free at 1-800-375-5283, or by visiting uscis.gov, where you can read the USCIS fact sheet describing the filing changes in detail.

Nancy-Jo Merritt focuses her practice in immigration law and has nearly three decades of experience representing domestic and international companies with issues concerning foreign national employees and business immigration matters. She provides strategic counseling to clients and assists employers in developing compliance programs. She earned her B.A., (1964) M.A., (1974) J.D., (1978) from Arizona State University.



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