



Office of Communications

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

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USCIS Update

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

WASHINGTON—On November 28, 2006, USCIS temporarily suspended Premium Processing Service for Aliens in a Religious Occupation which is filed on Form I-129, along with the Q-1 and R-1 Classifications Supplement. This announcement informs the public that additional time is needed to access whether it is possible to provide premium processing services for Religious Worker petitions. USCIS is therefore extending the suspension for another 6 months, with an expiration date of December 18, 2007. This is being done because USCIS' first and foremost mission is to ensure integrity in the adjudications process.

Premium Processing Service guarantees that within 15 calendar days of receipt of a petition, USCIS will issue either an approval notice, a notice of intent to deny, a request for evidence or open an investigation for fraud or misrepresentation. Due to the complexities of the USCIS adjudication processes at this time, USCIS cannot reasonably ensure this level of processing service for the R-1 petitions within 15 calendar days.

In August 2005, U. S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Office of Fraud Detection and National Security completed a Benefit Fraud Assessment (BFA) for religious worker petitions. The BFA revealed significant issues and potential vulnerabilities. On April 25, 2007, USCIS published the proposed rule Special Immigrant and Nonimmigrant Religious Workers, 72 FR 20442. When this rule becomes final, USCIS expects that many of the vulnerabilities previously found with this program will have been minimized. In the interim, to ensure the proper adjudication of religious worker petitions, additional time and procedures are necessary.

In the future, if USCIS is able to properly process these cases within 15 calendar days of receipt, the Form I-129 requesting R-1 nonimmigrant visa classification will once again be available for Premium Processing Service. USCIS may prescribe additional conditions of availability on Premium Processing Service for religious worker petitions. Alternatively, USCIS may publish a Federal Register Notice permanently removing the R-1 nonimmigrant visa classification from eligibility for Premium Processing Service.

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