

Skilled Workers Win Reversal of Decision on Green Cards

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By JACQUELINE PALANK

WASHINGTON, July 17 — The immigration agency announced Tuesday that public opinion had caused it to reverse an earlier government decision that prevented thousands of legal immigrants from obtaining work-based permanent visas.

On June 12, the State Department encouraged highly skilled immigrants here on temporary employment visas to apply for permanent employment visas, known as green cards, to become permanent residents. The department said the visas would be available starting July 2. But on that date, the department announced that all available employment-based visas had been distributed for the year.

On Tuesday, however, the immigration agency, Citizenship and Immigration Services, said it would accept applications for these visas if they were filed by Aug. 17.

“The public reaction to the July 2 announcement made it clear that the federal government’s management of this process needs further review,” Emilio T. Gonzalez, the agency’s director, said in a statement. “I am committed to working with Congress and the State Department to implement a more efficient system in line with public expectations.”

State Department officials have said the alert in June was meant to speed visa processing, to make sure no visas went unused. Both agencies have tried to reduce green-card application backlogs.

Applicants for these employment visas are required to submit certified documents, among them employer sponsorship forms and federal certification that no American workers are available for their jobs, and must also undergo medical examinations. Many of them have a long work history in the United States.

The American Immigration Law Foundation, a group that advocates for immigrants’ legal rights, said in a statement that it had prepared, and had been poised to file, a class-action lawsuit to oppose the government’s July 2 decision. Bill Wright, a spokesman for the immigration agency, would not comment on whether the threat of litigation had prompted the agency’s reversal.