

Beverly Plowucha
3104 Chatham Road
Endwell, NY 13760-5830

March 6, 2007

USCIS Comments

Dear USCIS Comments:

I am writing to you as an international educator in opposition to the February 1, 2007, proposed rule "Adjustment of the Immigration and Naturalization Benefit Application and Petition Fee Schedule." The proposed fee increases are so exorbitant they will act as a disincentive for international students and scholars to study and work in the United States. USCIS must reconsider the role of appropriated funds to meet the administrative needs of the agency. I ask that fees be reduced to the actual cost of processing the application or petition.

International students and scholars, and campus officials that employ them, file tens of thousands of petitions and applications with USCIS annually, including:

- The near-doubling of the I-765 fee for international students in F status to apply for work authorization for Optional Practical Training, from \$180 to \$340.

- The increases in the fees required in connection with change of status from F to H-1B, including the increase from \$200 to \$300 (a 50 percent increase) in the I-539 application to change nonimmigrant status for dependents and the increase from \$190 to \$320 (a 68 percent increase) in the I-129 petition for nonimmigrant worker. These fees are on top of the required data collection and fraud prevention fee, which is not part of the fee schedule.

The increases in fees will have a severe impact on families. It will also negatively impact the community college international students and their ability to benefit from the legal F-1 benefits that they have earned by maintaining their status and completing their degrees. These fees charges are beyond their ability in many cases. This work authorization is a critical component for many students in continuing mastery of the theories and techniques they learned in the class. It also gives them guidance before continuing on to the Bachelors or Masters levels.

Apart from the direct impact of the excessive fees, they are contrary to clearly expressed U.S. policies. The President, the Secretary of State, and indeed the Secretary of Homeland Security have expressed clearly and often the high value that the United States places on attracting international students and scholars to this country. The United States reaps immeasurable benefits—for our foreign policy, our students' education, our economy, our competitiveness, and our public diplomacy—from attracting the best and brightest minds and the next generation of world leaders to America's educational institutions.

Regrettably, the increased fees will reinforce the inefficiencies and dysfunctionalities USCIS inherited from INS when the Department of Homeland Security was created. The solution to correcting the systemic problems that plague the agency is not to keep raising fees in a futile attempt to finance a twenty-first century agency. Unfortunately, to meet its statutory requirements, USCIS is turning to its only steady source of funding, its filers and petitioners, to finance the required modernization of its systems. While that is understandable, it is not acceptable as a matter of public policy, because it prices statutory benefits out of the reach of those who need them.

The fact that USCIS operates on a fee-funded basis creates a built-in incentive to subsidize unnecessary work. This creates an incentive to requiring USCIS approval for things; that way, you can charge a fee for processing the request, which provides necessary income to finance your broader operations. The I-765 fee for Optional Practical Training is a classic example. It used to be possible for school officials designated by the INS to approve OPT in accordance with agency regulations. The benefits of reinstituting and expanding this process speak for themselves: no application, no processing, no fee, one less task to be performed by the agency, more time to devote to what the agency really needs to do. There is no obvious public policy reason for USCIS to require agency approval for OPT today. With the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) now fully in place, it would be easy to devolve this responsibility back onto the schools. Yet the cost of processing this unnecessary application process continues to drive up the fee.

While I understand that USCIS is permitted by law to recover the full cost of its services through fees, and indeed has no other option so long as Congress is unwilling to appropriate funds for the operation of the agency, I ask that the fees be reduced to the actual cost of processing the application or petition. Meanwhile, I ask Congress to step up to its responsibility for fixing the untenable situation that drives these fee increases.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Beverly Plowucha, M.A. PDSO
607-785-7972

This message has been verified by CapwizXC as authentic and sent by this individual. Authentication ID: [36cyrve9]

Changed message text: 18.8%