

Matter of DHANASAR, Petitioner

Decided December 27, 2016

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Administrative Appeals Office

USCIS may grant a national interest waiver if the petitioner demonstrates: (1) that the foreign national's proposed endeavor has both substantial merit and national importance; (2) that he or she is well positioned to advance the proposed endeavor; and (3) that, on balance, it would be beneficial to the United States to waive the job offer and labor certification requirements. *Matter of New York State Dep't of Transp.*, 22 I&N Dec. 215 (Acting Assoc. Comm'r 1998), vacated.

ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER: Gerard M. Chapman, Esquire, Greensboro, North Carolina

In this decision, we have occasion to revisit the analytical framework for assessing eligibility for "national interest waivers" under section 203(b)(2)(B)(i) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1153(b)(2)(B)(i) (2012). The self-petitioner, a researcher and educator in the field of aerospace engineering, filed an immigrant visa petition seeking classification under section 203(b)(2) of the Act as a member of the professions holding an advanced degree. The petitioner also sought a "national interest waiver" of the job offer otherwise required by section 203(b)(2)(A).

The Director of the Texas Service Center denied the petition under the existing analytical framework, concluding that the petitioner qualifies for classification as a member of the professions holding an advanced degree but that a waiver of the job offer requirement would not be in the national interest of the United States. Upon de novo review, and based on the revised national interest standard adopted herein, we will sustain the appeal and approve the petition.

I. LEGAL BACKGROUND

Subparagraph (A) of section 203(b)(2) of the Act makes immigrant visas available to "qualified immigrants who are members of the professions holding advanced degrees or their equivalent or who because of their exceptional ability in the sciences, arts, or business, will substantially benefit prospectively the national economy, cultural or educational

interests, or welfare of the United States.” Under subparagraph (A), immigrant visas are available to such individuals only if their “services in the sciences, arts, professions, or business are sought by an employer in the United States.”

Before hiring a foreign national under this immigrant classification, an employer must first obtain a permanent labor certification from the United States Department of Labor (“DOL”) under section 212(a)(5)(A)(i) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1182(a)(5)(A)(i) (2012). *See also* 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(k)(4)(i) (2016). A labor certification demonstrates that DOL has determined that there are not sufficient workers who are able, willing, qualified, and available at the place where the alien is to perform such skilled or unskilled labor, and the employment of such alien will not adversely affect the wages and working conditions of workers in the United States similarly employed. In its labor certification application, the employer must list the position’s job requirements consistent with what is normally required for the occupation. *See* 20 C.F.R. § 656.17(h)(1) (2016). Moreover, the job requirements described on the labor certification application must represent the actual minimum requirements for the job opportunity. *See* 20 C.F.R. § 656.17(i)(1). That is, the employer may not tailor the position requirements to the foreign worker’s qualifications; it may only list the position’s minimum requirements, regardless of the foreign worker’s additional skills that go beyond what is normally required for the occupation. The employer must then test the labor market to determine if able, willing, or qualified U.S. workers are available with the advertised minimum qualifications. If such U.S. workers are found, the employer may not hire the foreign worker for the position, even if the foreign worker clearly has more skills (beyond the advertised qualifications). If the employer does not identify such U.S. workers and DOL determines that those workers are indeed unavailable, DOL will certify the labor certification. After securing the DOL-approved labor certification, the employer may then file a petition with DHS requesting the immigrant classification.

Under subparagraph (B) of section 203(b)(2), however, the Secretary of Homeland Security may waive the requirement of a “job offer” (namely, that the beneficiary’s services are sought by a U.S. employer) and, under the applicable regulations, of “a labor certification.” 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(k)(4)(ii).¹ That subparagraph states, in pertinent part, that the

¹ While appearing to limit national interest waivers to only aliens possessing exceptional ability in the sciences, arts, or business, 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(k)(4)(ii) was superseded in part by section 302(b)(2) of the Miscellaneous and Technical Immigration and Naturalization Amendments of 1991, Pub. L. No. 102-232, 105 Stat. 1733, 1743 (continued . . .)

Secretary “may, when the [Secretary] deems it to be in the national interest, waive the requirements of subparagraph (A) that an alien’s services in the sciences, arts, professions, or business be sought by an employer in the United States.”² Section 203(b)(2)(i) of the Act.

USCIS may grant a national interest waiver as a matter of discretion if the petitioner satisfies both subparagraphs (A) and (B). Thus, a petitioner who seeks a “national interest waiver” must first satisfy subparagraph (A) by demonstrating that the beneficiary qualifies as a member of the professions holding an advanced degree or as an individual of exceptional ability. *See* 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(k)(1)–(3) (providing definitions and considerations for making such determinations); *see also* section 203(b)(2)(C) of the Act (providing that possession of requisite academic degree or professional license “shall not by itself be considered sufficient evidence of exceptional ability”). The petitioner must then satisfy subparagraph (B) by establishing that it would be in the national interest to waive the “job offer” requirement under subparagraph (A).³ *See* 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(k)(4)(ii). This two-part statutory scheme is relatively straightforward, but the term “national interest” is ambiguous. Undefined by statute and regulation, “national interest” is a broad concept subject to various interpretations.

In 1998, under the legacy Immigration and Naturalization Service, we issued a precedent decision establishing a framework for evaluating national interest waiver petitions. *Matter of New York State Dep’t of Transp.* (“*NYSDOT*”), 22 I&N Dec. 215 (Acting Assoc. Comm’r 1998).

(“MTINA”). Section 302(b)(2) of MTINA amended section 203(b)(2)(B)(i) of the Act by inserting the word “professions” after the word “arts,” and thereby made the national interest waiver available to members of the professions holding advanced degrees in addition to individuals of exceptional ability.

² Pursuant to section 1517 of the Homeland Security Act (“HSA”) of 2002, Pub. L. No. 107-296, 116 Stat. 2135, 2311 (codified at 6 U.S.C. § 557 (2012)), any reference to the Attorney General in a provision of the Act describing functions that were transferred from the Attorney General or other Department of Justice official to the Department of Homeland Security by the HSA “shall be deemed to refer to the Secretary” of Homeland Security. *See also* 6 U.S.C. § 542 note (2012); 8 U.S.C. § 1551 note (2012).

³ To do so, a petitioner must go beyond showing the individual’s expertise in a particular field. The regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(k)(2) defines “exceptional ability” as “a degree of expertise significantly above that ordinarily encountered” in a given area of endeavor. By statute, individuals of exceptional ability are generally subject to the job offer/labor certification requirement; they are not exempt by virtue of their exceptional ability. Therefore, whether a given petitioner seeks classification as an individual of exceptional ability, or as a member of the professions holding an advanced degree, that individual cannot qualify for a waiver just by demonstrating a degree of expertise significantly above that ordinarily encountered in his field of expertise.

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