



U.S. Department of Labor

News Release

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Backlog ends in permanent labor certification program

U.S. Department of Labor marks on-time, as-promised milestone

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Labor today announced that the permanent foreign labor certification program's backlog has been eliminated, with nearly 99 percent of cases completed and the remainder awaiting responses from employers. For almost three years, more than 300 workers in two processing centers reviewed approximately 363,000 pending labor applications, a backlog created as a result of legislative changes in 1997 and 2000.

"Clearing up the Permanent Labor Certification backlog has been a Presidential Management Agenda priority and the job was completed on-time, as promised," said U.S. Secretary of Labor Elaine L. Chao. "Thousands of people are no longer left waiting and wondering, and the department is moving ahead with reforms to streamline existing foreign worker certification programs."

The Permanent Labor Certification Program processes employer requests for foreign workers when U.S. workers are not available, willing and able to fill job openings. Statutory changes to the Immigration and Nationality Act in 1997 and 2000 led to a dramatic increase in paper applications to this employment-based program. As a result, processing times rose, and applications sometimes languished for several years. Attempts to curb the growing backlog began immediately in 2001 and included regulatory and non-regulatory steps as well as seeking out experts to devise solutions for processing the caseload efficiently. Those efforts culminated with the November 2004 opening of temporary facilities in Dallas and Philadelphia dedicated solely to eliminating the backlog.

From the outset, the department pledged that the backlog would be eliminated by September 30, 2007. Both of the Backlog Elimination Centers have started a transition and shutdown phase that will continue through December.

"We applaud the accomplishments of the dedicated individuals whose critical role allowed the ongoing operation of employment-based immigration programs," said Assistant Secretary for Employment and Training Emily Stover DeRocco. "Their resolve to the mission of seeing the task through to its successful completion is an inspiration to all who serve and do the public's business."

For more information on the department's employment-based foreign labor certification programs, please visit www.foreignlaborcert.doleta.gov.

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