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Department of State Narrows Nonimmigrant Visa Interview Waiver Eligibility

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Beginning on September 2, 2025, U.S. consulates will implement a more restrictive version of the nonimmigrant visa (NIV) interview waiver (IW) program. The IW program is also commonly referred to as “drop box” visa appointments, which allows applicants to renew visa applications without an in-person interview. The Department of State announced the new restrictions on July 25, 2025 (IW Update).

Background

In February 2025, the Department of State (DOS) significantly scaled back the COVID-era expanded IW program, which had allowed waivers for applicants whose prior visa in the same classification expired within 48 months, and in some cases, for first-time visa applicants. The February revision limited eligibility to applicants renewing a visa in the same category that was still valid or had expired within the past 12 months. Under the IW Update, the circumstances when interviews will be waived will narrow even further.

While participation in any IW program remains optional for U.S. consulates, those offering the service must adhere to the new, more restrictive criteria. Under the IW Update, nearly all applicants will be required to attend an in-person visa interview, with exceptions applying primarily to most diplomatic and official visa applicants and certain B-1/B-2 applicants. Notably, individuals under age 14 and over age 79, who had been previously exempt from interviews, will now be required to appear in person.

Who Remains Eligible for an Interview Waiver

Under the IW Updates, only the following applicants may qualify for an interview waiver:

- Applicants classifiable under the visa symbols A-1, A-2, C-3 (except attendants, servants, or personal employees of accredited officials), G-1, G-2, G-3, G-4, NATO-1 through NATO-6, or TECRO E-1;
- Applicants for diplomatic- or official-type visas; and
- Applicants renewing a full validity B-1, B-2, B1/B2 visa or a Border Crossing Card/Foil (for Mexican nationals) within 12 months of the prior visa's expiration, and who were at least 18 years old at the

time of the prior visa's issuance.

Practical Implications

Foreign nationals who no longer qualify for an interview waiver, and those with children under age 14, should expect to attend an in-person interview at a U.S. consulate starting September 2. Appointment availability varies widely with each consular post and visa category, and the reduced IW eligibility will likely increase demand for in-person slots. Applicants should plan their travel and submit applications well in advance and inform their employers early about time off requests. Based on these changes, we anticipate longer administrative processing times that will also delay the issuance of visa stamps after the appointment. Applicants scheduling non-diplomatic nonimmigrant visa applications are heavily discouraged from applying at countries other than their country of nationality or residence, to avoid the risk of even greater delays due to administrative processing.

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