U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

Non-Precedent Decision of the Administrative Appeals Office

In Re: 32718071

Date: AUG. 12, 2024

Appeal of Nebraska Service Center Decision

Form I-140, Immigrant Petition for Alien Workers (National Interest Waiver)

The Petitioner seeks second preference immigrant classification as a member of the professions holding an advanced degree or as an individual of exceptional ability, as well as a national interest waiver of the job offer requirement attached to this EB-2 classification. *See* Immigration and Nationality Act (the Act) section 203(b)(2), 8 U.S.C. § 1153(b)(2).

The Director of the Nebraska Service Center denied the petition, concluding the Petitioner had not established eligibility for a waiver of the required job offer, and thus of the labor certification, would be in the national interest. The matter is now before us on appeal. 8 C.F.R. § 103.3.

The Petitioner bears the burden of proof to demonstrate eligibility by a preponderance of the evidence. *Matter of Chawathe*, 25 I&N Dec. 369, 375-76 (AAO 2010). We review the questions in this matter de novo. *Matter of Christo's, Inc.*, 26 I&N Dec. 537, 537 n.2 (AAO 2015). Upon de novo review, we will dismiss the appeal.

I. LAW

To establish eligibility for a national interest waiver, petitioners must demonstrate qualification for the underlying EB-2 visa classification, as either an advanced degree professional or an individual of exceptional ability in the sciences, arts, or business. Section 203(b)(2)(B)(i) of the Act. In addition, petitioners must show the merit of a discretionary waiver of the job offer requirement "in the national interest." Section 203(b)(2)(B)(i) of the Act. *Matter of Dhanasar*, 26 I&N Dec. 884, 889 (AAO 2016) provides that U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) may, as matter of discretion,[1] grant a national interest waiver if:

- The proposed endeavor has both substantial merit and national importance,
- The individual is well-positioned to advance the proposed endeavor, and
- On balance, waiving the job offer requirement would benefit the United States.

[1] *See also Flores v. Garland*, 72 F.4th 85, 88 (5th Cir. 2023) (joining the Ninth, Eleventh, and D.C. Circuit Courts (and Third in an unpublished decision) in concluding that USCIS' decision to grant or deny a national interest waiver to be discretionary in nature).

II. ANALYSIS

Regarding the national interest waiver, the first prong relates to substantial merit and national importance of the specific proposed endeavor. *Dhanasar*, 26 I&N Dec. at 889. The Petitioner intends to work as a pastor, and offer services relating to pastoral counseling, "growing . . . a mature firm that will engage the services of other skilled counselors." The Petitioner stressed, both with his petition and on appeal, the "social, cultural, and communal value" of his proposed endeavor, in which he proposes to "engage troubled communities" to teach them "coping mechanisms that will achieve responsible citizenship amidst their current grief and hurting."

The Director determined the Petitioner established the substantial merit, but not the national importance, of the proposed endeavor. As it relates to substantial merit, the endeavor's merit may be shown in a range of areas such as business, entrepreneurialism, science, technology, culture, health, or education. *Dhanasar*, 26 I&N Dec. at 889. Because the record reflects the proposed endeavor falls within one or more of these areas, the Petitioner established the substantial merit aspect.

In determining national importance, the relevant question is not the importance of the industry or profession in which the individual will work; instead, we focus on "the specific endeavor that the foreign national proposes to undertake." *See Dhanasar*, 26 I&N Dec. at 889. Although the Petitioner contends that his statement discussed the importance of mental health care in its relation to a community, the matter here is not whether mental health care or its related topics are nationally important. Rather, the Petitioner must demonstrate the national importance of his specific, proposed endeavor of providing his services as a pastor through his company in the Pennsylvania area.

In *Dhanasar*, we noted that "we look for broader implications" of the proposed endeavor and that "[a]n undertaking may have national importance for example, because it has national or even global implications within a particular field." *Id.* We also stated that "[a]n endeavor that has significant potential to employ U.S. workers or has other substantial positive economic effects, particularly in an economically depressed area, for instance, may well be understood to have national importance." *Id.* at 890.

The Petitioner also argues the submission of his letters discussed the impact of his work in the field. Although the letters discuss the Petitioner's particular services, the letters do not show the broader impact of the Petitioner's work. Rather, they are limited to discussing his specific skills, and the writers' experiences working with and knowing the Petitioner. Moreover, the letters cover the Petitioner's prior work and accomplishments and relate more to the second prong rather than the first prong of the *Dhanasar* framework. *Id.* at 890.

To evaluate whether the Petitioner's proposed endeavor satisfies the national importance requirement, we look to evidence documenting the "potential prospective impact" of the work. *Id.* at 889. Here, the Petitioner did not demonstrate how his services would largely influence the field and rise to the level of national importance. In *Dhanasar*, we determined the petitioner's teaching activities did not rise to the level of having national importance because they would not impact his field more broadly. *Id.* at 893. The record does not show through supporting documentation how the Petitioner's endeavor

sufficiently extends beyond his prospective clients, to impact the field or the U.S. economy more broadly at a level commensurate with national importance.

Finally, the Petitioner did not show how his pastoral counseling firm has significant potential to employ U.S. workers or otherwise offer substantial positive economic effects for our nation. While the Petitioner contends that "economic benefits may best be understood in a correlated rather than direct sense," the Petitioner did not sufficiently explain or demonstrate how his particular proposed endeavor would have any projected U.S. economic impact or job creation. Without such evidence, the record does not show any benefits to the U.S. regional or national economy resulting from his services or position would reach the level of "substantial positive economic effects" as contemplated by *Dhanasar*. *Id.* at 890.

Because the documentation in the record does not establish the national importance of the proposed endeavor as required by the first prong of the *Dhanasar* precedent decision, the Petitioner has not demonstrated eligibility for a national interest waiver. Further analysis of the Petitioner's eligibility under the second and third prongs outlined in *Dhanasar*, therefore, would serve no meaningful purpose.[2]

III. CONCLUSION

As the Petitioner has not met the requisite first prong of the *Dhanasar* analytical framework, we conclude the Petitioner has not demonstrated eligibility for or otherwise merits a national interest waiver as a matter of discretion. The appeal will be dismissed for the above stated reasons, with each considered as an independent and alternate basis for the decision.

ORDER: The appeal is dismissed.

[2] *See INS v. Bagamasbad*, 429 U.S. 24, 25 (1976) (stating that agencies are not required to make "purely advisory findings" on issues that are unnecessary to the ultimate decision); *see also Matter of L-A-C-*, 26 I&N Dec. 516, 526 n.7 (BIA 2015) (declining to reach alternate issues on appeal where applicants do not otherwise meet their burden of proof).