

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY
Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services

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DHS Assists Prospective Adoptive Parents Facing SARS-Related Delays
Rule Extends Validity of Key Application for Those Affected by Outbreak in China

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Department of Homeland Security today announced that it is amending its regulations to assist prospective adoptive parents who face processing delays in China due to the recent outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). The change will give the Director of the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS) discretionary authority to extend the validity of a key application, which in some cases may expire before parents can complete the adoption.

The first step for many American parents seeking to adopt a child abroad is to file an Application for Advanced Processing of Orphan Petition (Form I-600A), which is required to secure government certification as to their suitability to adopt. Once approved, the I-600A is valid for 18 months, during which time the applicants must identify an orphan they wish to adopt and file a Petition to Classify Orphan as an Immediate Relative (Form I-600). If an I-600 is not filed within 18 months, the original I-600A is deemed abandoned, and the applicants must begin the process anew.

In late May, the Chinese Center for Adoption Affairs (CCAA) suspended the processing adoptions for six weeks in response to SARS. The suspension raised concerns among prospective parents that their I-600A approval will expire before they receive CCAA documentation that permits them to travel to China to finalize the adoption.

Under an interim rule published in today's Federal Register, the BCIS Director now has the discretionary authority to extend the validity of the I-600A in cases where parents face processing delays as a direct result of the SARS-related suspension of processing.

“Amending our regulations to account for this extraordinary circumstance is the prudent thing to do,” said BCIS Director Eduardo Aguirre. “It will allow us to help parents who complete their adoption, while continuing to protect the best interest of the child, which is, and must always be, our paramount concern.”

The Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS) was established within the Department of Homeland Security on March 1, 2003 by consolidating several components of the former INS. The BCIS is charged with fundamentally transforming and improving the delivery of immigration and citizenship services, while enhancing the integrity of our nation's security.

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