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Press Release

USCIS ANNOUNCES NEW WORK AUTHORIZATION DOCUMENTATION FOR CITIZENS OF PACIFIC ISLAND NATION

WASHINGTON, DC - U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) announced today a change in the documentation that citizens from the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) can use as proof of permission to work in the United States. Effective immediately, an unexpired RMI passport with unexpired documentation showing admission under the Compact of Free Association (CFA) is valid proof of work authorization.

Recent Congressionally approved changes to the CFA mean that citizens of RMI no longer need an employment authorization document to work in the United States. Although this change is effective throughout the United States, the highest concentration of RMI citizens affected by this announcement currently lives in Hawaii.

In 1986, independence was granted to two Pacific island nations, the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) and the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), that were previously a part of a United Nations trust territory under U.S. administration. The CFA provides for uniquely close relations between the United States and the FSM and RMI, including immigration matters. Through the CFA, most citizens of the FSM and RMI can live, work or study in the United States with no visa requirement. A third Pacific Island nation, the Republic of Palau, has a similar Compact with the United States. These three nations are often collectively referred to as the "Freely Associated States" (FAS).

Citizens of the FAS admitted under the compacts have enjoyed, and continue to enjoy, "open market" employment authorization. Citizens of the Republic of Palau and the FSM, as before, must possess a valid employment authorization document before work in the United States. (The legislation approving the changes to the CFA with the RMI authorized changes for the FSM CFA, but not the Republic of Palau, whose Compact remains unchanged. The FSM amendments – while expected to take effect later this year – have not yet come into force.)

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On March 1, 2003, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services became one of three legacy INS components to join the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. USCIS is charged with fundamentally transforming and improving the delivery of immigration and citizenship services, while enhancing our nation's security.