

BCIS Begins e-filing for EAD and Green Card Renewals

May 29, 2003

The Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS) has implemented an e-filing procedure for all Employment Authorization Document (EAD) filings and Green Card (I-551) Renewal filings, effective May 29, 2003.

"The introduction of e-filing represents an important stride in our effort to deliver immigration services in a more efficient and customer-friendly way while meeting out national security objectives," said Tom Ridge, Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security. "These two forms are the first of many immigration applications we plan to make available for online filing in the near future."

The BCIS press release indicates that e-filing for EAD and Green Card renewals is the first step in a 10-year plan to permit e-filing for all immigration benefits. BCIS plans to implement e-filing on a larger scale for other commonly used forms for immigration benefits by year's end. These additional forms include the I-129 (petition for nonimmigrant worker – H-1B, L-1A/B etc.), I-131 (Application for Travel Document – Advance Parole), I-140 (Immigrant Petition for Alien Worker), I-539 (Application to Extend/Change Nonimmigrant Status), I-821 (Application for Temporary Protected Status) and I-907 (Request for Premium Processing).

e-filing initially will not be required, but will be an option for EAD and Green Card renewals. Although e-filing sounds easier and faster than traditional paper filing, it does have some limitations. For instance, while e-filing does allow the electronic submission of the necessary form or petition and payment, it does not allow for submission of photographs or fingerprints that are necessary for some petition benefits, such as the Employment Authorization Card (photograph) and Green Card Renewal (photograph and fingerprint). Both of the applications for which e-filing is now available require the applicant to travel to a BCIS Application Service Center (ASC) so that their photograph, signature and fingerprints may be digitally captured for the final production of the immigration document. This requirement to travel to a BCIS ASC, in many cases, is more burdensome than simply filing paper applications that already contain the applicant's signature and photograph.

Although current e-filing options require travel to a BCIS ASC, most of the proposed e-filing forms, such as the I-129, I-140 and I-907 do not require photographs, signatures or fingerprint captures. As a result, future e-filing options are likely to be more efficient than the current paper filing methods.