

Dated: August 16, 2024.

Lauren K. Roth,

Associate Commissioner for Policy.

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

22 CFR Part 40

[Public Notice: 12464]

RIN 1400–AF77

Visas: Visa Ineligibility

AGENCY: Department of State.

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: The Department of State (“Department”) is amending a regulation relating to the effect of certain pardons on criminal-related grounds of visa ineligibility.

DATES: This final rule is effective on August 22, 2024.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Jami Thompson, Office of Visa Services, Bureau of Consular Affairs, Department of State; telephone (202) 485–7586, VisaRegs@state.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

A. Background

The Department of State (“Department”) is amending its regulations at 22 CFR 40.21(a)(5), and 22 CFR 40.22(c) regarding the effect of a pardon on a visa applicant’s ineligibility under section 212(a)(2)(A) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) (8 U.S.C. 1182(a)(2)(A)) and INA section 212(a)(2)(B) (8 U.S.C. 1182(a)(2)(B)), respectively. The current regulation at 22 CFR 40.21(a)(5) provides that an alien is not ineligible for a visa under INA section 212(a)(2)(A) if a full and unconditional pardon has been granted by the President of the United States, by a governor of a state of the United States, or by certain other specified officials. Similarly, the current regulation at 22 CFR 40.22(c) provides that an alien is not ineligible for a visa under INA section 212(a)(2)(B) based on having been convicted of two or more offenses, if a full and unconditional pardon has been granted by the President of the United States, by a governor of a state of the United States, or by certain other specified officials. The Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals recently examined the regulation at 22 CFR 40.21(a)(5), finding that it conflicts with INA’s provisions in section 212(a)(2)(A)(i) governing inadmissibility based on conviction or admission of certain crimes, which do not include an

exception or waiver to that inadmissibility for applicants who receive a pardon.

. . . the [INA] is clear that a pardon does not make an otherwise inadmissible noncitizen admissible, even if a pardon can save a resident noncitizen from being removed . . . and where agency regulations conflict with statutory text, statutory text wins out every time. We simply cannot square [22 CFR 40.21(a)(5)] with the text and structure of the INA as it was amended in 1990.

Wojciechowicz v. Garland, 77 F.4th 511, 514, 518 (7th Cir. 2023) (internal citations and parentheticals omitted). The Department agrees with the Seventh Circuit’s opinion in *Wojciechowicz* as it applies to gubernatorial pardons and finds that the court’s analysis regarding the lack of underlying authority in the INA giving effect to such pardons also extends to the Department’s regulation at 22 CFR 40.22(c) regarding ineligibility for multiple criminal convictions.

B. Legal Background

The Department first promulgated these rules in 1959 at 22 CFR 41.91(a)(9)–(10).¹ At the time the regulations were first promulgated, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, as amended (“1952 Act”), provided that noncitizens were excludable² from the United States and ineligible for visas if they had been convicted of a crime involving moral turpitude or two or more criminal offenses. Unlike the 1952 Act’s provisions on grounds of deportation, which did provide that the criminal-related ground of deportation “shall not apply” to individuals who had received a full and unconditional pardon by the President of the United States or by the Governor of any of the several States, the 1952 Act did not include a provision on the effect of a pardon on excludability. Section 222(a) of the 1952 Act did, however, speak to the possible relevance of a previous pardon or amnesty to an individual’s eligibility for an immigrant visa, requiring that all immigrant visa applicants provide such information among a range of other specified fields.

While the 1952 Act did not expressly include a provision on the effect of a pardon on excludability, the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) held in 1954 that such pardons also remove

excludability under now-INA section 212(a)(2)(A)(i). *Matter of H—*, 6 I&N Dec. 90, 96 (BIA 1954) (“As long as there is a full and unconditional pardon granted by the President or by a Governor of a State covering the crime which forms the ground of deportability, *whether in exclusion or expulsion*, the immunizing feature of the pardon clause applies . . .”) (emphasis added).

Following promulgation of the Department’s 1959 rule, amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act and multiple court decisions have removed any ambiguity about whether there is a statutory basis to except individuals from inadmissibility under INA section 212(a)(2)(A)(i) or INA section 212(a)(2)(B) based on a gubernatorial pardon. Congress revised the grounds of deportation relating to convictions of crimes involving moral turpitude and aggravated felonies under section 602(a) of the Immigration Act of 1990 (“IMMACT 90”) and, among the revisions, added a new clause to that ground expressly authorizing waivers of that ground in cases of certain pardons, including gubernatorial pardons. In the same Act, Congress similarly revised the INA’s ground of inadmissibility in INA section 212(a)(2)(A)(i) for conviction of certain crimes to include a separate clause of exceptions to that ground and did not include any such language excepting applicants from ineligibility if their relevant conviction had been pardoned. Congress also subsequently amended INA section 222(a) to no longer expressly require that all immigrant visa applicants provide information on a previous pardon or amnesty.³

In more recent years, courts have also consistently reached the opposite conclusion of *Matter of H—* regarding the effect of a pardon on a conviction that leads to criminal-related inadmissibility, like the court’s findings in *Wojciechowicz*. Each court that has considered the effect of a gubernatorial pardon on admissibility has uniformly found that Congress did not include an exception to inadmissibility under INA section 212(a)(2)(A)(i) based on having received a pardon as it had done in the corresponding section outlining the criminal grounds for deportation. For example, in *Balogun vs. U.S. Attorney General*, a case involving a gubernatorial pardon, the Eleventh Circuit held that because the criminal-related inadmissibility ground “does not have a pardon provision like [8 U.S.C.]

¹ See 24 FR 6678 (Aug. 18, 1959).

² The 1952 Act referred to “classes of aliens [that] shall be ineligible to receive visas and [that] shall be excluded from admission into the United States” (emphasis added). The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA), 110 Stat. 3009–546, introduced the language of “inadmissible aliens” as part of a broader reorganization of the INA.

³ Immigration and Nationality Technical Corrections Act of 1994, Public Law 103–416, Section 205(a).