



U.S. Citizenship and  
Immigration Services

## New Legislation Increases Availability of Visas for CNMI Workers for Fiscal Year 2017

*Visas prohibited for most construction workers and employers must pay higher education fee for FY 2017 and future fiscal years*

Release Date: Aug. 28, 2017

**WASHINGTON** - On Aug. 22, 2017, President Trump signed the [Northern Mariana Islands Economic Expansion Act, H.R. 339](#), revising the visa classification for Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) Transitional Workers. This visa classification, referred to as the CW-1 visa, allows employers within the CNMI to apply for permission to employ foreign (nonimmigrant) workers who are otherwise ineligible to work under other nonimmigrant worker categories.

The legislation added 350 CW-1 visas to the fiscal year (FY) 2017 CW-1 cap, raising the total number of visas that may be issued from 12,998 to 13,348. The additional 350 visas are immediately and exclusively available to current CW-1 workers who are applying to extend their status and whose petition validity period expires between August 23 and September 30, 2017.

Of these additional visas, 60 are reserved for "healthcare practitioners and technical occupations" and 10 are reserved for "plant and system operators" as those terms are defined in the U.S. Department of Labor's Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system. For filing information, please refer to [The CNMI-Only Transitional Worker \(CW-1\) Cap page](#).

Effective immediately, CW-1 visas will generally no longer be available to workers performing jobs classified as "construction and extraction occupations" in the SOC system. CW-1 visas will be issued for construction and extraction occupations only if the worker has maintained continuous CW-1 status for the same employer since before October 1, 2015. This new limitation applies to CW petitions that are pending with USCIS as of August 22, 2017, as well as to any petitions filed in the future.

The mandatory CNMI education fee that all CW-1 employers must pay has increased from \$150 to \$200 for each CW-1 worker per year. USCIS will reject any petition received after August 22, 2017, that includes an incorrect or insufficient fee payment. This fee increase does NOT apply to CW petitions already filed and pending with USCIS.

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