

USCIS Strongly Encourages Filing Change of Address form Online

As an immigration attorney, the issue of the best way to file a change of address for my clients is a reoccurring theme. Based on a teleconference held by USCIS on May 26, 2009, this article will discuss why USCIS states that the best way to file the change of address form is online.

General Background Information

USCIS rules require that anyone that is not a U.S. citizen must file a change of address form with USCIS within 10 days of moving. The Immigration Courts often require that the change of address form be filed within 5 days. The USCIS' change of address form must be filed on form AR-11, and the Court's change of address form must be filed on form EOIR-33/IC. If the person is not in removal / deportation proceedings, then only the form AR-11 must be filed with USCIS.

How to File the AR-11 Form

Applicants can file the form AR-11 online, via mailing in the form, and via calling the customer service phone number for immigration at 1-800-375-5283. If an applicant wishes to file form AR-11 through mail, he or she should go to www.uscis.gov for current filing locations or should call the 1-800# for information.

Based upon a teleconference that USCIS held on May 26, 2009, the best way to file the change of address form AR-11 is online. Through filing the form online at www.uscis.gov, the applicant can insert the case number for EACH application he or she has pending with the USCIS. Further, USCIS states that the applicant's form AR-11 information will be transferred to all the cases that the applicant has both in the past and present, if the form is filed online.

If the form is filed through the mail, then the applicant must send several AR-11's to different locations, including an additional form to any USCIS service centers (i.e. California service center, Texas service center, etc.) where the applicant may have a case pending. Applicants that send Form AR-11 to only the Service Center and / or district offices have not met the requirements under the form AR-11, as the AR-11 must first be filed at its designated address. Applicants filing cases on their own should not rely on the addresses listed on the instructions page for each form, as USCIS often does not update the instructions page. Applicants should look online at the USCIS website for more updated information.

However, by filing online, the applicant will receive a confirmation link which can be printed for the applicant's recordkeeping in case USCIS does not update his or her address. If the applicant mails in the change of address, there is no confirmation that USCIS has received the form, unless the applicant uses certified mail with return receipt requested. Applicants will receive a confirmation if they make the change of address request by calling the 1-800# indicated above, but filing the change of address online is preferred by USCIS.

An important point that USCIS stressed during the teleconference is that applicants that file the AR-11 online should NOT also mail in the AR-11, as this will cause confusion. Filing the form AR-11 online is sufficient.

However, if applicants call the National Customer Service hotline at the 1-800# indicated above to change their address, they are still required to file a paper AR-11. Calling the 1-800# to change the address does NOT satisfy the requirements under the change of address rules.

The notification for updating USCIS of change of address applies to green card holders that are residing lawfully in the U.S. Therefore green card holders who live outside the U.S. should consult an immigration attorney regarding whether they need to file a form AR-11 to notify USCIS of their residence outside the U.S. Of course, there are many rules regarding how long green card holders can remain outside the U.S. during one trip, and this is a separate issue from the one discussed in this article.

It is important to Timely Notify USCIS of Address Change

Updating one's address with USCIS is recommended, because failure to do so will result in applicant's not receiving important decisions, requests for evidence, or interview notices for their pending cases. If the applicants do not respond to USCIS as indicated in the notice that USCIS sends to applicants, often USCIS will then deny the case based on abandonment by the applicant. Therefore be diligent in filing the form AR-11, preferably online as per USCIS's recommendations through their teleconference.