

One Minute Memo®



Update on Department of State Visa Systems Issues

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On June 15, 2015, the Department of State (DOS) announced that the Bureau of Consular Affairs was experiencing technical problems with its visa systems, which resulted in delays in printing visas and the possible rescheduling of visa interviews. The affected visa systems performed national security checks which were required prior to visa issuance. In particular, DOS stated that a hardware failure on June 9, 2015 stopped the flow of biometric clearance requests from U.S. consular posts to the Consular Consolidated Database (CCD), which supports worldwide visa and passport verification and processing.

UPDATE:

As of June 19, 2015, the Bureau of Consular Affairs continues to experience technical problems with its visa systems. According to DOS, more than 100 computer experts from both the public and private sectors across the U.S. are working on the problem around the clock. However, many visa applicants who were scheduled for visa appointments between June 15, 2015 and June 26, 2015 have received appointment cancellation emails from DOS with instructions to reschedule their appointments on the first available date. In light of these sudden cancellations and the demand for rescheduling, many applicants have been unable to schedule new visa appointments until the end of July or later. In addition, those individuals who have already submitted their passports for visa stamping and are awaiting the return of their passports and visa stamps will continue to face delays until the visa systems are up and running. Importantly, we have learned that some U.S. consular posts are treating requests for passport returns as visa denials, which may cause complications with future visa applications and registration for the Visa Waiver Program (VWP).

According to recent information provided by DOS during the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) Annual Conference in Washington D.C., the agency expects that the visa systems will be operational in some capacity over the next week, but no definitive date has been given. In the meantime, DOS will prioritize visa issuance for agricultural workers and humanitarian cases. Based on additional information obtained during the AILA Conference, applicants who wish to apply for their visas in Canada, but do not hold Canadian passports nor reside in Canada, will be unable to secure visa appointments until October 2015.

Until the DOS visa systems are restored and functional, foreign nationals may face significant visa issuance delays and should plan their travel carefully. Any questions or issues affecting visa status should be directed to Seyfarth Shaw as soon as possible.

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