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## **Approval Rate Declines for H-1B Visas**

**The Trump administration, which has made overhaul of the immigration system a priority, is asking for supplemental information in many more applications**

By Louise Radnofsky

WASHINGTON—The Trump administration is demanding supporting evidence in many more applications for coveted H-1B visas for high-skilled foreign workers, and denying more petitions, according to its own data published Friday.

The number of requests for evidence by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, which administers the visa program, has grown as the administration has sought to overhaul the immigration system.

Some 60% of companies that applied on behalf of foreign workers received requests for supplemental information in the last quarter of 2018, compared with about 46% of applicants who got the demand in the year-earlier quarter and 28% in the final quarter of 2016. The approval rate fell to 75% in the final quarter of 2018, from 83% a year earlier and 92% in the same period in 2016.

The data included companies seeking to extend visas for current employees, as well as applications for prospective new hires.

USCIS director L. Francis Cissna, who started in his position in October 2017, has pledged stricter vetting in the immigration system and policies that he said would [protect the interests of U.S. workers](#).

The Trump administration said that the majority of applications were still being approved and that it was strengthening the immigration system by [making it more rigorous](#).

“As part of our efforts to fulfill President Trump’s ‘Buy American and Hire American’ executive order, USCIS has made a series of reforms designed to protect U.S. workers, increase our confidence in the eligibility of those who receive benefits, cut down on frivolous petitions and improve the integrity and efficiency of the immigration-petition process,” said Jessica Collins, a USCIS spokeswoman.

Companies were most often asked to prove that a sponsored job was a “specialty occupation,” a requirement for granting the visa under the law, USCIS said. Companies were commonly asked if they had valid employer-employee relationships with the prospective workers. Firms were also asked to show that the workers had specific assignments for the duration of the visa.

Approval rates varied significantly for the 30 biggest users of the system, according to the data released for the 2018 fiscal year, according to USCIS.

Five of the 30 companies had 99% approval rates: [Apple](#) Inc., [Facebook](#) Inc., Google Inc., [Intel](#) Corp. and [Microsoft](#) Corp. [Amazon.com](#) Services and [Cisco Systems](#) Inc. each had a 98% rate, USCIS said, and JPMorgan Chase & Co. saw a 97% rate.

Some companies had relatively high numbers of applications but lower approval rates, led by information-technology services companies [Cognizant Technology Solutions](#) Corp. , with a 68% approval rate, and Capgemini America Inc., with a 60% approval rate.

New applications from IT services companies appeared to be down from previous years, said Stuart Anderson, executive director of the **National Foundation for American Policy**, a free-market think tank supportive of immigration, which has tracked initial applications over several years.

That could be due to a combination of changing needs in the market, more denials and a slower pace of adjudications, Mr. Anderson said. Denial rates were higher for new applications than for employees seeking to extend visas, he said.

Some businesses contend that requests for evidence, in particular, are choking up an already hamstrung system. Other observers say that [tighter scrutiny](#) of outsourcing firms’ use of the H-1B program is long overdue.

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