

## Restricted Criteria for Visa Interview Waiver

On February 18, 2025, the U.S. Department of State (DOS) confirmed a much narrower interview waiver policy than what has been in place for several years. The announcement may be found at this link: [Interview Waiver Update](#).

**PLEASE NOTE:** This change in visa interview process only impacts individuals traveling outside the U.S. and who are applying for a new visa stamp in their passport. It does not affect in-country change of status or extension applications submitted to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Currently, there is no option to renew a visa stamp from within the U.S.

**BACKGROUND:** DOS rules require every nonimmigrant visa applicant between ages of 14 and 79 to apply in person and be interviewed by a consular officer at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate abroad. But there are certain specific exceptions allowing a waiver of the interview requirement. With the current long interview scheduling wait times at many U.S. consulates, being able to have an interview waived is very valuable.

**CHANGE:** With this new DOS update, applicants must now meet all of the criteria below to be eligible for an interview waiver, including the Dropbox in India:

- An applicant must be applying in the same category of his/her previously issued visa. In other words, first time applicants must be interviewed. This includes those previously on OPT that have not had an H1B visa stamp issued since changing to H-1B status;
- An applicant's old visa must have expired within the 12 months prior to application (a change from 48 months);
- Applicants must apply in their country of nationality or residence;
- Applicants can never have been refused a visa (unless such refusal was overcome or waived); and
- Applicants must have no apparent or potential ineligibility.

Applicants who do not meet all of the above criteria must schedule and attend an in-person interview for their visa application.

There are reports that those with already scheduled Dropbox appointments in India, and who previously qualified for interview waiver in other countries, are being turned away and told to schedule in-person interview appointments. This change will significantly increase the appointment wait times for visa stamping interviews so visa applicants outside the US should be prepared for delays. It may take 48 hours or more after being told to reschedule for the system to allow applicants to schedule an interview.

Those still in the US scheduling appointments should plan accordingly. You may find information on the various [U.S. Consulates and Embassies at this site](#). Estimated wait times for a visa interview at each post [can be found here](#), although this site is not updated frequently.

UAMS Immigration Services is still advising that all international employees avoid international travel if possible. Further travel guidance [can be found here](#).