U.S. Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Office of the Director
Camp Springs, MD 20588-0009

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

September 23, 2026 PA-2026-14

Policy Alert

SUBJECT: Controlled Substance Trafficking, Significant Trafficking in Persons, and Money Laundering Grounds of Inadmissibility

Purpose

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is issuing policy guidance in the USCIS Policy Manual to address the inadmissibility of aliens engaged in controlled substance trafficking, significant trafficking in persons, and money laundering under section 212(a)(2) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA).

Background

The criminal and related grounds of inadmissibility are designed to protect the United States and its citizens from harm and threats to public safety. Accordingly, aliens inadmissible under the criminal and related grounds of inadmissibility are generally barred from receiving visas, admission to the United States, and adjustment of status to that of a lawful permanent resident unless they qualify for a waiver or meet an exception. The statute outlines nine distinct criminal grounds of inadmissibility, three of which relate to controlled substance trafficking, significant trafficking in persons, and money laundering. These three grounds are found at INA 212(a)(2)(C), INA 212(a)(2)(H), and INA 212(a)(2)(I).

USCIS is adding guidance on how officers determine whether an alien is inadmissible under the controlled substance trafficking, significant trafficking in persons, and money laundering grounds. Providing clear guidance on the inadmissibility determination supports officers' ability to make inadmissibility determinations that are consistent with the statute, which ensures a fair, consistent, and legally sufficient adjudicative process.

This guidance, contained in Volume 8 of the Policy Manual, is effective immediately and applies to requests pending or filed on or after the publication date. The guidance contained in the Policy Manual is controlling and supersedes any related prior guidance.

Policy Highlights

- Defines statutory and associated terms related to the controlled substance trafficking, significant trafficking in persons, and money laundering grounds of inadmissibility.

- Explains who may be found inadmissible as a controlled substance trafficker, a significant trafficker in persons, and an alien engaged in money laundering.
- States who may be eligible for waivers, exemptions, and exceptions to the controlled substance trafficker, significant traffickers in persons, and money laundering grounds of inadmissibility.
- Describes the evidence that USCIS officers should consider when making inadmissibility determinations under INA 212(a)(2)(C), INA 212(a)(2)(H), and INA 212(a)(2)(I) and the associated burden of proof.
- Explains that when a spouse, son, or daughter of an alien inadmissible under INA 212(a)(2)(C)(i) or INA 212(a)(2)(H)(i) applies for a discretionary immigration benefit, an officer may consider financial or other benefits obtained by these family members at any time when determining whether the spouse, son, or daughter merits a favorable exercise of discretion.
- Explains that when a former spouse of an alien inadmissible under INA 212(a)(2)(C)(i) or INA 212(a)(2)(H)(i) applies for a discretionary immigration benefit, an officer may consider financial or other benefits obtained by the former spouse when determining whether the former spouse merits a favorable exercise of discretion.

Summary of Changes

Affected Section: Volume 8 > Admissibility

- Adds new Part D (Criminal and Related Grounds of Inadmissibility).

USCIS may also make other minor technical, stylistic, and conforming changes consistent with this update.

Citation

Volume 8: Admissibility, Part D, Criminal and Related Grounds of Inadmissibility, Chapter 10, Controlled Substance Traffickers [8 USCIS PM D.10], Chapter 14, Significant Traffickers in Persons [8 USCIS PM D.14], and Chapter 15, Money Laundering [8 USCIS PM D.15].