



**U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services**

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A. Determining Eligibility

The special immigrant juvenile (SIJ) classification is available to children who have been subject to state juvenile court proceedings related to abuse, neglect, abandonment, or a similar basis under state law. If a juvenile court has made certain findings, under state law, on dependency or custody, parental reunification, and the best interests of the child, then the child may be eligible for SIJ classification.

USCIS determines if the petitioner meets the requirements for SIJ classification by adjudicating a Petition for Amerasian, Widow(er), or Special Immigrant ([Form I-360](http://www.uscis.gov/i-360) (<http://www.uscis.gov/i-360>)).⁽¹⁾ USCIS' adjudication of the SIJ petition includes review of the petition, the juvenile court order (or orders), and supporting evidence to determine if the petitioner is eligible for SIJ classification. USCIS generally defers to the court on matters of state law and does not go behind the juvenile court order to reweigh evidence and make independent determinations about abuse, neglect, or abandonment.

B. General

A petitioner must satisfy the following requirements to qualify for SIJ classification:

General Eligibility Requirements for SIJ Classification

Physically present in the United States

Unmarried

Under the age of 21 on the date of filing the Petition for Amerasian, Widow(er), or Special Immigrant ([Form I-360 \(http://www.uscis.gov/i-360\)](http://www.uscis.gov/i-360))

Juvenile court order (or orders) issued in the United States that meets the specified requirements

U.S. Department of Homeland Security consent

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) consent, if applicable

C. Age-out Protections

In general, a “child” is an unmarried person under 21 years of age for purposes of SIJ classification. ^[2] USCIS considers the petitioner’s age at the time the SIJ petition is filed when determining whether the petitioner has met the age requirement. ^[3]

If a petitioner was under 21 years of age on the date of the proper filing of [Form I-360 \(http://www.uscis.gov/i-360\)](http://www.uscis.gov/i-360), USCIS cannot deny SIJ classification solely because the petitioner is older than 21 years of age at the time of adjudication.

D. Juvenile Court Order

To be eligible for SIJ classification, a juvenile court in the United States must have issued order (or orders) with the following findings:

- Dependency or Custody – Declares the petitioner dependent on the court, or legally commits or places the petitioner under the custody of either a state agency or department, or a person or entity appointed by a state or juvenile court; ^[4]
- Parental Reunification – Declares, under the state child welfare law, that the petitioner cannot reunify with one or both of the petitioner’s parents prior to aging out of the juvenile court’s jurisdiction due to abuse, neglect, abandonment, or a similar basis under state law; and
- Best Interests – Finds that it would not be in the petitioner’s best interest to be returned (to a placement) in the petitioner’s, or his or her parent’s, country of nationality or last habitual residence.

1. Dependency ^[5] or Custody

The petitioner must be the subject of a juvenile court order that declares him or her dependent on a juvenile court, or legally commits to or places the petitioner under the custody of either an agency or department of a state, or a person or entity appointed by a state or juvenile court.

Placing the petitioner “under the custody of” a person requires physical custody. A qualifying court-appointed custodial placement could be with one parent, if reunification with the other parent is found to be not viable due to that parent’s abuse, neglect, or abandonment of the petitioner.

Court-ordered dependency or custodial placements that are intended to be temporary generally do not qualify for the purpose of establishing eligibility for SIJ classification.^[6] A court-appointed custodian that is acting as a temporary guardian or caretaker of a child, taking on all or some of the responsibilities of a parent,^[7] is not considered a custodian for purposes of establishing SIJ eligibility.^[8]

2. Parental Reunification^[9]

The juvenile court must find that reunification with one or both parents is not viable due to abuse, neglect, abandonment, or a similar basis under the relevant state child welfare laws. Lack of viable reunification generally means that the court intends its finding that the child cannot reunify with his or her parent (or parents) remains in effect until the child ages out of the juvenile court’s jurisdiction.^[10] The temporary unavailability of a child’s parent does not meet the eligibility requirement that family reunification is not viable. However, actual termination of parental rights is not required.

The findings must be based upon the person (or persons) who is the petitioner’s parent (or parents)^[11] under state law. If the juvenile court order establishes that the person (or persons) is the petitioner’s parent (or parents), USCIS generally considers this requirement met. However, if the record does not establish that the person (or persons) is the petitioner’s parent (or parents), USCIS may request additional evidence. For example, if the findings are based on a father not listed on the petitioner’s birth certificate, a determination that the claimed father is the father under state law should be established in the juvenile court order.

3. Best Interests

Juvenile courts do not have the authority to make decisions on the removal or deportation of a child to another country. However, it must be determined by the juvenile court (or in administrative proceedings recognized by the juvenile court) that it would not be in the best interest of the petitioner to be returned to the country of nationality or last habitual residence of the petitioner or his or her parents. Accordingly, this requires a determination by the juvenile court that a placement in the child’s, or his or her parents’, country of nationality or last habitual residence is not in the child’s best interest.

While the standards for making best interests determinations may vary between states, a best interests determination generally involves the deliberation that courts undertake under state law when deciding what types of services, actions, and orders will best serve a child, as well as a deliberation regarding who is best suited to take care of a child.^[12] The court’s finding that a particular custodial placement is the best alternative available to the petitioner in the United States does not necessarily establish that a placement in the petitioner’s country of nationality would not be in the child’s best interest.^[13] USCIS defers to the juvenile court in making this determination and as such does not require the court to conduct any analysis other than what is required under state law.

4. Validity of Order

Issued under State Law

The juvenile court order must have been properly issued under state law to be valid for the purposes of establishing eligibility for SIJ classification. This includes the need for the juvenile court to follow their state laws on jurisdiction.^[14] For example, a juvenile court may not be able to take jurisdiction and issue a dependency or custody order for a juvenile who is 18 years of age or older even though the juvenile may file his or her petition with USCIS until the age of 21. There is nothing in USCIS guidance that should be construed as instructing juvenile courts on how to apply their own state law.

Continuing Jurisdiction

In general, the petitioner must remain under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court at the time of the filing and adjudication of the SIJ petition, subject to some exceptions discussed below. If the petitioner is no longer under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court for a reason related to their underlying eligibility for SIJ classification, the petitioner is not eligible for SIJ classification. This may include cases in which the petitioner is no longer under the jurisdiction of the court because:

- The court vacated or terminated its findings that made the petitioner eligible because of subsequent evidence or information that invalidated the findings; or
- The court reunified the petitioner with the parent with whom the court previously deemed reunification was not viable because of abuse, neglect, abandonment, or a similar basis under state law.

However, this requirement does not apply if the juvenile court jurisdiction ended solely because:

- The petitioner was adopted, or placed in a permanent guardianship; or
- The petitioner was the subject of a valid order that was terminated based on age before or after filing the SIJ petition (provided the petitioner was under 21 years of age at the time of filing the SIJ petition).^[15]

A petitioner with a juvenile court order who moves to the jurisdiction of a different juvenile court may need to either submit evidence that the petitioner is still under the jurisdiction of the court that issued the order or submit a new court order.

A juvenile court order does not necessarily terminate because of a petitioner's move to another court's jurisdiction. In general, a court maintains jurisdiction when it orders the child placed in a different state or makes a custody determination and the legal custodian relocates to a new jurisdiction.^[16] If, however, a child relocates to a new jurisdiction and is not living in a court ordered placement or with the court ordered custodian, then the petitioner must submit:

- Evidence that the court is still exercising jurisdiction over the petitioner; or
- A new juvenile court order from the court that has jurisdiction.^[17]

If the original order is terminated due to the relocation of the child but another order is issued in a new jurisdiction, USCIS considers the dependency or custody to have continued through the time of adjudication of the SIJ petition, even if there is a lapse between court orders.

5. USCIS Consent

The William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008 (TVPRA 2008)^[18] simplified but did not remove the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) consent requirement. In order to consent, USCIS must review the juvenile court order to conclude that the request for SIJ classification is bona fide, which means that the juvenile court order was sought to obtain relief from abuse, neglect, abandonment, or a similar basis under state law, and not primarily or solely to obtain an immigration benefit.^[19] The court ordered dependency or custodial placement of the child is the relief being sought from the juvenile court, and the factual basis of each of the required findings is evidence that the request for SIJ classification is bona fide.

USCIS relies on the expertise of the juvenile court in making child welfare decisions and does not reweigh the evidence to determine if the child was subjected to abuse, neglect, abandonment, or a similar basis under state law. In order to exercise the statutorily mandated DHS consent function, USCIS requires that the juvenile court order or other supporting evidence contain or provide a reasonable factual basis for each of the findings necessary for classification as a SIJ. The evidence needed does not have to be overly detailed, but must confirm that the juvenile court made an informed decision in order to be considered “reasonable.” USCIS generally consents to the grant of SIJ classification when the order includes or is supplemented by a reasonable factual basis for all of the required findings.

USCIS recognizes that there may be some immigration motive for seeking the juvenile court order. For example, the court may make findings in separate hearings and the petitioner may request an order that compiles the findings of several orders into one order to establish eligibility for SIJ classification. A special order issued to help clarify the findings that were made so that USCIS can determine the petitioner’s eligibility for SIJ classification does not mean that the order is not bona fide.

E. HHS Consent

If a petitioner is currently in the custody of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and seeks a juvenile court order that also alters^[20] his or her custody status or placement, HHS must consent to the juvenile court’s jurisdiction. HHS consent is not required if the order simply restates the petitioner’s current placement.

F. Inadmissibility and Waivers

Grounds of inadmissibility do not apply to the adjudication of the SIJ petition.^[21] Therefore, a petitioner does not need to apply for a waiver of any applicable grounds of inadmissibility in order to be eligible for SIJ classification.

G. Family Members

Unlike some other immigrant visa petitions, SIJ classification does not allow the petitioner's family members to be included on the petition as derivative beneficiaries. SIJ petitioners that have adjusted status to that of a lawful permanent resident may petition for qualifying family members through the family-based immigration process. However, a petitioner who adjusts status as a result of an SIJ classification may not confer an immigration benefit to his or her natural or prior adoptive parents.¹²²⁾ This prohibition also applies to a non-abusive, custodial parent, if applicable.

Footnotes

1. [^]
USCIS also adjudicates the Application to Register Permanent Residence or Adjust Status (Form I-485 (<http://www.uscis.gov/i-485>)), which determines eligibility for adjustment of status to lawful permanent residence. See Volume 7, Adjustment of Status, Part F, Special Immigrant-Based (EB-4) Adjustment, Chapter 7, Special Immigrant Juvenile [7 USCIS-PM F.7 (<http://connect.uscis.dhs.gov/workingresources/policymanual/Pages/HTML/PolicyManual-Volume7-PartF-Chapter7.aspx>)].
2. [^]
USCIS interprets the use of the term "child" in Section 235(d)(6) of the William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008 (TVPRA 2008), Pub. L. 110-457 (<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-110publ457/pdf/PLAW-110publ457.pdf>), 122 Stat. 5044, 5080 (December 23, 2008), to refer to the definition of child in INA 101(b)(1) (<http://www.uscis.gov/ilink/docView/SLB/HTML/SLB/0-0-0-1/0-0-0-29/0-0-0-101/0-0-0-434.html#0-0-0-1131>), which states that a child is an unmarried person under 21 years of age.
3. [^]
Section 235(d)(6) of the TVPRA 2008, Pub. L. 110-457 (<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-110publ457/pdf/PLAW-110publ457.pdf>), 122 Stat. 5044, 5080 (December 23, 2008), provides age-out protection to SIJ petitioners.
4. [^]
For information on which state courts USCIS considers a juvenile court, see Chapter 3, Documentation and Evidence, Section A, Juvenile Court Orders and Administrative Documents, Subsection 1, Qualifying Juvenile Court Proceedings [6 USCIS-PM J.3(A)(1) (<http://connect.uscis.dhs.gov/workingresources/policymanual/Pages/HTML/PolicyManual-Volume6-PartJ-Chapter3.aspx#S-A-1>)].
5. [^]
This requires that the petitioner has been declared dependent upon a juvenile court located in the United States in accordance with state law governing such declarations of dependency, while he or she is in the United States and under the jurisdiction of the court. See 8 CFR 204.11 ([https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?node=se8.1.204_111\)\(c\)\(3](https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?node=se8.1.204_111)(c)(3)). For an example of state law governing declarations of dependency, see California Welfare and Institutions Code Section 300.
6. [^]

USCIS generally requires that the court order be valid at the time of filing and must determine that the court intends that the child will not reunify with at least one parent until the child reaches the age of majority. See [8 CFR 204.11\(c\)\(5\)](https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?&node=se8.1.204_111) (https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?&node=se8.1.204_111). See Subsection 2, Parental Reunification [[6 USCIS-PM J.2\(D\)\(2\)](#)] (<http://connect.uscis.dhs.gov/workingresources/policymanual/Pages/HTML/PolicyManual-Volume6-PartJ-Chapter2.aspx#S-D-2>).

7. [^] See Black's Law Dictionary (10th ed. 2014) (defining "in loco parentis").
8. [^] A department or agency of a State, or an individual or entity appointed by a State court or juvenile court located in the United States, acting in loco parentis, shall not be considered a legal guardian for purposes of this section or section 462 of the Homeland Security Act of 2002 ([6 U.S.C. 279](#)) (<http://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title6/chapter1/subchapter4/partE&edition=prelim>). See Section 235(d)(5) of the TVPRA 2008, [Pub. L. 110-457](#) (<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-110publ457/pdf/PLAW-110publ457.pdf>), 122 Stat. 5044, 5080 (December 23, 2008).
9. [^] The TVPRA 2008 replaced the need for a juvenile court to deem a juvenile eligible for long-term foster care with a requirement that the juvenile court find reunification with one or both parents not viable. The term "eligible for long-term foster care" is defined at [8 CFR 204.11\(a\)](#) (https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?&node=se8.1.204_111), as requiring that family reunification no longer be viable and that this determination would be expected to remain in place until the child reached the age of majority. USCIS interprets the TVPRA changes as a clarification that petitioners do not need to be eligible for or placed in foster care and that they may be reunified with one parent or other family members. However, USCIS requires that the reunification no longer be a viable option with at least one parent, and USCIS maintains that the court's determination is meant to be in place until the child reaches the age of majority. See [8 CFR 204.11](#) (https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?node=se8.1.204_111)(a). See Section 235(d)(1)(A) of TVPRA 2008, [Pub. L. 110-457](#) (<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-110publ457/pdf/PLAW-110publ457.pdf>), 122 Stat. 5044, 5079 (December 23, 2008).
10. [^] For example, when parental reunification is no longer the goal of the child welfare authority's plan for a permanent living situation for the child (known as a "permanency plan").
11. [^] The term "parent" does not encompass a step-parent unless the step-parent is recognized as the petitioner's legal parent under state law, such as when a step-parent has adopted the petitioner.
12. [^] See [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Child Welfare Information Gateway, Determining the Best Interests of the Child](#) (<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/laws-policies/statutes/best-interest/>).
13. [^] See [58 FR 42843-01](#) (<https://cdn.loc.gov/service/ll/fedreg/fr058/fr058154/fr058154.pdf>), 42848 (August 12, 1993).

14. [^] For an order to be considered an eligible juvenile court order, the court must have jurisdiction under state law to make judicial determinations about the care and custody of juveniles. See [8 CFR 204.11\(a\)](https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?&node=se8.1.204_111) (https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?&node=se8.1.204_111). See *Perez-Olano v. Holder* (<http://www.uscis.gov/laws/legal-settlement-notice/settlement-agreement-perez-olano-et-al-v-holder-et-al-case-no-cv-05-3604-us-district-court-central-district-california>), Case No. CV 05-3604 (C.D. Cal. 2005) at paragraph 8.
15. [^] See *Perez-Olano v. Holder* (<http://www.uscis.gov/laws/legal-settlement-notice/settlement-agreement-perez-olano-et-al-v-holder-et-al-case-no-cv-05-3604-us-district-court-central-district-california>), Case No. CV 05-3604 (C.D. Cal. 2005).
16. [^] Some states have adopted the Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction and Enforcement Act (UCCJEA) and the Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC). The UCCJEA is a Uniform Act drafted by the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws. The UCCJEA is effective only upon adoption by state legislatures. See Sections 201-204 of UCCJEA available at the [Uniform Law Commission website on UCCJEA](http://www.uniformlaws.org/Act.aspx?title=Child%20Custody%20Jurisdiction%20and%20Enforcement%20Act) (<http://www.uniformlaws.org/Act.aspx?title=Child Custody Jurisdiction and Enforcement Act>). ICPC is a binding contract between member jurisdictions. The ICPC establishes uniform legal and administrative procedures governing the interstate placement of children. Each state and the District of Columbia have enacted the provisions of the ICPC under state law.
17. [^] See [8 CFR 204.11\(c\)\(5\)](https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?&node=se8.1.204_111) (https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?&node=se8.1.204_111).
18. [^] See [Pub. L. 110-457](http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-110publ457/pdf/PLAW-110publ457.pdf) (<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-110publ457/pdf/PLAW-110publ457.pdf>) (December 23, 2008).
19. [^] See [INA 101\(a\)\(27\)\(J\)\(iii\)](http://www.uscis.gov/ilink/docView/SLB/HTML/SLB/0-0-0-1/0-0-0-29/0-0-0-101/0-0-0-195.html#0-0-0-905) (<http://www.uscis.gov/ilink/docView/SLB/HTML/SLB/0-0-0-1/0-0-0-29/0-0-0-101/0-0-0-195.html#0-0-0-905>) (consent requirement). See H.R. Rep. No. 105-405, at 130 (1997).
20. [^] See *Perez-Olano v. Holder* (<http://www.uscis.gov/laws/legal-settlement-notice/settlement-agreement-perez-olano-et-al-v-holder-et-al-case-no-cv-05-3604-us-district-court-central-district-california>), Case No. CV 05-3604 (C.D. Cal. 2005).
21. [^] For discussion on the applicability of inadmissibility grounds to SIJ-based applicants for adjustment of status, see Volume 7, Adjustment of Status, Part F, Special Immigrant-Based (EB-4) Adjustment, Chapter 7, Special Immigrant Juvenile [[7 USCIS-PM F.7](#)] (<http://connect.uscis.dhs.gov/workingresources/policymanual/Pages/HTML/PolicyManual-Volume7-PartF-Chapter7.aspx>).
22. [^] See [INA 101\(a\)\(27\)\(J\)\(iii\)\(II\)](http://www.uscis.gov/ilink/docView/SLB/HTML/SLB/0-0-0-1/0-0-0-29/0-0-0-101/0-0-0-195.html#0-0-0-899) (<http://www.uscis.gov/ilink/docView/SLB/HTML/SLB/0-0-0-1/0-0-0-29/0-0-0-101/0-0-0-195.html#0-0-0-899>).

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