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Certain Travelers Exempt from New \$250 U.S. Visa Integrity Fee

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Beginning 1 October 2025, a new \$250 surcharge known as the Visa Integrity Fee will be applied to most nonimmigrant visas issued outside the United States. Signed into law as part of Title V of the *One Big Beautiful Bill Act* (H.R. 1) on 4 July 2025, this fee aims to generate revenue for immigration enforcement, promote visa compliance, and cover the cost of security screenings. However, several categories of travelers will be fully exempt from the fee under the legislation and its corresponding regulations.

The Visa Integrity Fee applies to nearly all nonimmigrant visa categories issued by U.S. consulates abroad. It will be collected at the time of visa issuance—after approval but before the visa is stamped—and is charged in addition to existing Machine-Readable Visa

(MRV) fees and any reciprocity fees based on the applicant's country of origin. The fee is not charged in cases where a visa is denied.

Visa categories subject to the fee include:

- **Tourist and Business Visas:** B-1/B-2
- **Student and Exchange Visas:** F-1, F-2, J-1, J-2, M-1
- **Employment Visas and Dependents:** H-1B, L-1, O-1, P, TN, and corresponding dependent visas (H-4, L-2, O-3, P-2, TD)

An automatic adjustment for inflation is scheduled to take place in Fiscal Year 2026.

Despite its wide scope, the law provides several key exemptions. Travelers from countries participating in the **Visa Waiver Program (VWP)**, including most European nations, Japan, and Australia, are exempt as long as they use the **Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA)** for short-term travel. Citizens of Canada and Bermuda also fall outside the scope of the fee, as they typically do not require nonimmigrant visas for brief visits.

Exemptions further extend to those holding **A-series visas** (diplomatic personnel), **G-series visas** (representatives of international organizations), and select **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)** visa categories. These exemptions apply to both principal applicants and their immediate dependents. Individuals admitted to the United States under humanitarian protections—such as refugees and asylees—are also excluded.

The **U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS)** and the **U.S. Department of State** retain the authority to waive the fee in certain cases. This includes exemptions for hardship, public interest, or bilateral reciprocity. Decisions regarding exemptions for minors and senior citizens will also fall under DHS discretion.

In practical terms, exempt travelers will not be required to pay the \$250 fee at the time of visa issuance or ESTA approval. No retroactive charges apply, even if a traveler's visa status changes, as the fee is only assessed when a new visa is issued. Dependents of exempt visa holders also retain their exemption status.

As of October 2025, the total cost of obtaining a nonimmigrant visa for most applicants will rise to \$435, factoring in the existing \$185 MRV fee and the new \$250 surcharge. For exempt groups, however, this increase will not apply.

The rationale behind these exemptions includes diplomatic reciprocity, the avoidance of undue financial hardship on vulnerable populations, and the preservation of long-standing travel agreements with allied nations. While discussions continue about the possibility of refunds for compliant travelers, no official process has yet been implemented.

These defined exemptions offer reassurance to eligible travelers amid broader changes to visa policy and rising processing costs across the board.