

PRESS RELEASE

Larsen & Toubro Technology Services Pays \$9,928,000 To Resolve False Claims Act Allegations

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For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, District of South Carolina

COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA — L&T Technology Services, LTD (“LTTS”), a company based in India, with U.S. offices in Edison New Jersey, has agreed to pay \$9,928,000 to resolve allegations that between 2014 and 2019, LTTS underpaid visa fees owed to the United States by acquiring inexpensive B-1 visas, rather than more expensive H-1B visas, in alleged violation of the False Claims Act.

LTTS provides services and personnel to companies in the United States. Most of the personnel are foreign nationals, who are required to have visas in order to lawfully enter or remain in the United States.

B-1 visas generally do not permit visa holders to perform paid labor while in the United States. During the time period in question, fees for B-1 visas were between approximately \$200 to \$300, and there was no limit on the number of B-1 visas that could be issued.

Although H-1B visas permit foreign nationals to perform paid labor while in this country, the visa fees for such work visas were between approximately \$4,000 to \$6,000. Additionally, such visas are more difficult to obtain, because they are limited by an annual cap of 65,000, to foreign nationals with the equivalent of a bachelor’s degree in an occupation requiring highly specialized knowledge; plus an additional 20,000 H-1B visas annually to those in such occupations with a master’s degree or its equivalent.

The investigation leading to this settlement was initiated through the filing of a whistleblower (qui tam) complaint in the United States District Court in Charleston, South Carolina, captioned *United States ex rel. Michael Harmon v. L&T Technology Services, et. al.*, Civ. No. 2:16-cv-01114-BHH (D.S.C.). By law, Mr. Harmon will receive a percentage of the recovery.

“The U.S. Attorney’s Office will hold accountable those who skirt this country’s visa requirements,” said U.S. Attorney for the District of South Carolina Adair F. Boroughs.

"Our immigration laws are intended to protect American jobs for American workers, and we will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to ensure companies securing work visas for foreign nationals strictly comply with those laws."

"This settlement sends a clear message to those who seek to defraud the U.S. government and exploit our nation's laws, that you will be found and held accountable," said Ronnie Martinez, Special Agent In Charge of HSI Charlotte, covering North and South Carolina. "Protecting the integrity of the nation's immigration and labor laws from those looking to exploit them is of vital importance and HSI prioritizes this mission."

"This settlement is a success in deterring companies in seeking to evade and violate the laws and regulations governing the non-immigrant visa programs managed by the Department of State and Department of Homeland Security," said Chris Hileman, Special Agent in Charge, Department of State, Office of Inspector General. "It has been and always will be our pleasure to work with the U.S. Attorney's Office and our law enforcement partners to protect our immigration laws, the U.S. workers and our economy and hold those accountable who exploit them."

"When companies apply for work visas, they must follow the rules and pay appropriate fees, just like workers. We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to vigorously pursue those who circumvent worker visa programs," said Mathew Broadhurst, Special Agent in Charge, Southeast Region, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General."

"We are pleased at the outcome of this case," said Karen L. Brown Cleveland, Special Agent in Charge of the Washington Field Office of the U.S. Department of State's Diplomatic Security Service (DSS). "The Diplomatic Security Service values our partnership with the U.S. Attorney's Office and other law enforcement agencies around the world to prevent and jointly combat U.S. passport and visa fraud. Deterring, detecting, and investigating U.S. passport and visa fraud is essential to safeguarding our national security."

The case was investigated by Homeland Security Investigations, the USCIS Nebraska Service Center Fraud Detection Unit, the U.S. Department of State's Office of Inspector General, the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Inspector General, and the U.S. Department of State's Diplomatic Security Service.

The case was handled by Assistant United States Attorneys Stan Ragsdale, Beth Warren, and Brook Andrews of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of South Carolina.

The claims resolved by the settlement are allegations only, and there has been no determination of liability. LTTS has denied liability, is cooperating with the United States in this matter, and has taken significant steps to ensure compliance with U.S. visa laws.

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