The Department of Homeland Security has issued a new rule that tightens how USCIS handles signatures on immigration filings. Starting **July 10, 2026**, USCIS may **reject or deny** an application, petition, or request if it contains an **invalid signature**, including situations where the case was already accepted and a receipt notice was issued.

This is a meaningful shift. Historically, many filers treated a receipt notice as confirmation that basic intake requirements, including signatures, were satisfied. Under the new rule, that assumption is no longer safe for filings submitted on or after the effective date.

Effective date and scope

- **Effective date: July 10, 2026**
- **Applies to:** immigration benefit requests **submitted on or after** July 10, 2026
- **Authority clarified:** USCIS officers are expressly permitted to take adverse action for signature defects, even after acceptance

DHS has stated the rule responds to increasing concerns about **fraudulent, questionable, or noncompliant signatures**, and it is intended to standardize enforcement and clarify officer authority across form types and filing channels.

What USCIS considers a valid signature

USCIS continues to require a signature that is attributable to the correct individual and completed in an acceptable format. Under the rule and related guidance concepts, the following are generally treated as **valid** (depending on form instructions and filing method):

- **Handwritten signatures** (traditional wet-ink signing)
- **Scanned copies of wet-ink signatures** (for forms that permit submission of a copy)
- **Faxed or photocopied documents** that were originally signed in wet ink
- **Certain electronic signatures in limited online filing situations** where USCIS specifically authorizes electronic signing through a USCIS-controlled process

The key point is that USCIS is distinguishing between a copy of a real wet-ink signature and a “manufactured” signature image. A scan of a wet-ink signature is different from an image file dropped into a PDF and reused as a template signature.

Signatures USCIS is targeting as invalid

DHS has highlighted recurring issues with signatures that do not reflect a proper act of signing by the authorized person. The rule is aimed squarely at practices often seen in high-volume or remote workflows.

Examples of signatures that may be treated as **invalid** include:

- **Copy-paste signatures** reused across multiple forms or cases
- **Digitally inserted images** of signatures that appear auto-applied rather than personally executed
- **Stamped signatures**, including stamp-style blocks used in lieu of signing
- **Signature software produced signatures** that generate a standardized signature output rather than capturing an actual signature act in a compliant manner
- **Unauthorized signatures**, meaning the person who signed lacked authority to sign that form for that filing

USCIS has also flagged "questionable" signatures, which can include signatures that do not match the purported signer's identity, appear templated, or suggest a third party applied the signature without proper authorization.

Rejection vs denial, and why it matters more now

One of the biggest practical consequences is that USCIS may address a signature defect at different stages, with different outcomes.

Rejection (intake stage)

A rejection typically occurs before USCIS accepts the filing. Consequences commonly include:

- The package is returned
- A receipt notice is not issued
- The filing is not considered properly filed as of the attempted delivery date

This can still be damaging, especially if timing matters. But it is a known risk many compliance teams already plan around.

Denial (after acceptance)

The new rule emphasizes that USCIS can also **deny** a request after it has been accepted if the signature is invalid. That creates additional risks:

- **Potential loss of filing fees**, depending on the benefit type and procedural posture
- **Delays** that can impact eligibility windows and related benefits
- Greater uncertainty because the defect may surface later, after time has passed and downstream planning has relied on the receipt notice

The ability to deny after acceptance is the operational change that requires process updates.

Timing and downstream impacts

Signature defects are not merely technical. A rejection or denial for an invalid signature can cause timing disruptions that have real legal and operational consequences, including:

- **Priority date and time-in-status implications** in categories where timing is critical
- **Work authorization gaps**, where employment authorization depends on a properly filed extension or a timely-filed related application
- **Lawful presence concerns**, depending on the benefit type, individual facts, and whether a timely filing was needed to maintain a period of authorized stay
- **Travel and documentation problems**, when a delayed receipt or denial affects ancillary benefits or planned travel

For employment-based filings in particular, avoidable signature defects can also create **I-9 and employer compliance pressure**, especially when a worker's continued employment depends on timely extensions or automatic extension rules tied to proper filing.

Corporate and high-volume filing risks

Employers and organizations that file at scale, or that rely on distributed signing practices, should assume increased scrutiny of signature quality and provenance. The rule also intersects with operational realities like remote work, HR decentralization, and third-party preparation.

Common friction points include:

- Signatures collected by email and inserted into PDF forms
- Use of old “signature files” kept on shared drives
- Delegated signing where authority is unclear or poorly documented
- Reuse of signature blocks across multiple related filings

These practices can be convenient but can also look like the exact conduct DHS is trying to deter.

Quality control steps to reduce avoidable signature errors

The rule change supports implementing stricter procedural controls around signatures. Practical steps that align with the rule’s direction include:

- **Confirm who must sign** each form (petitioner, beneficiary, employer signatory, preparer) and confirm that person signs in the required capacity
- **Document signatory authority** for employer filings, including job title and internal authorization where relevant
- **Avoid templated signature images** and any workflow that relies on reusing a stored signature graphic
- **Use wet-ink signing where feasible**, then scan the signed page for submission if copies are acceptable
- **If filing online through USCIS**, use only the USCIS-authorized electronic signature process applicable to that account and form type
- **Implement a signature audit checkpoint** before submission, separate from general form completeness review

Because the rule allows action even after acceptance, quality control should treat signature compliance as a substantive filing condition, not an intake formality.