



## DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

### 15 CFR Parts 8 and 20

[Docket No. 260107-0012]

RIN 0605-AA76

### Removing Outdated Language from Regulatory Definitions of “United States”

**AGENCY:** Office of Civil Rights, Department of Commerce.

**ACTION:** Final rule.

**SUMMARY:** By this rule, the Department of Commerce (Department) amends the definition of the term “United States” set forth in two of its regulations. Specifically, this rule removes references to “the Canal Zone,” which is no longer part of the United States, and makes other minor edits to ensure that the two definitions are identical. This action is necessary to ensure that the Department’s regulations are accurate, up-to-date, and consistent. The intended effect is to eliminate outdated language, reduce inconsistencies across the Department’s regulations, and minimize the possibility of confusion.

**DATES:** Effective [INSERT DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER].

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Daniel Sweeney, Senior Counsel, Office of the General Counsel, at (202) 482-1395.

### SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

#### I. Background

The Department originally published the regulations at 15 CFR part 8 and 15 CFR part 20 in final rules on July 5, 1973 (38 FR 17938), and August 13, 1986 (51 FR 28926), respectively. The regulations at 15 CFR part 8 were promulgated to effectuate Section 602 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. 2000d-1), which directs each Federal department and agency to issue regulations implementing the statutory prohibition on discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin. Similarly, the regulations at 15 CFR part 20 were promulgated

to effectuate the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, as amended (42 U.S.C. 6101 *et seq.*), and the corresponding government-wide regulations at 45 CFR part 90, which establish a general prohibition against discrimination on the basis of age. Both 15 CFR part 8 and 15 CFR part 20 include a regulation defining the term “United States” to include “the Canal Zone”—a reference to the Panama Canal Zone. *See* 15 CFR 8.3(c); 15 CFR 20.3(o). As relevant for 15 CFR part 20, the government-wide regulations at 45 CFR part 90 likewise set forth a definition of “United States” that includes “the Canal Zone.” 45 CFR part 90.4.

The Panama Canal Zone was an exclusive concession of the United States from 1903 to 1979. Thereafter, the Canal was jointly controlled by the United States and the country of Panama until 1999. Then, on December 31, 1999, the United States officially transferred full control of the Canal to Panama. The regulatory definitions of the term “United States” set forth in 15 CFR 8.3(c) and 15 CFR 20.3(o) have not been updated to reflect these historical developments and still indicate that the Canal Zone is part of the United States.

## **II. Discussion**

By this rule, the Department is updating the definitions of the term “United States” set forth in 15 CFR 8.3(c) and 15 CFR 20.3(o) to accurately reflect the current scope of the United States and its territories and possessions. In particular, the Department is removing from both §§ 8.3(c) and 20.3(o) references to the Panama Canal Zone, as that Zone is no longer considered part of the United States. This removal will promote not only accuracy but also consistency across the Department’s regulations, as 15 CFR 801.2(a), for instance, does not define “United States” to include the Canal Zone. *See* 15 CFR 801.2(a) (defining the term “United States, “when used in a geographic sense,” to mean “the several States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and all territories and possessions of the United States.”). This removal will, however, create some inconsistency between the Department’s age discrimination regulations (15 CFR part 20) and the government-wide age discrimination regulations (45 CFR part 90), since “United States” is defined in 45 CFR 90.4 to include the

Canal Zone. The Department nevertheless finds it appropriate to amend §§ 8.3(c) and 20.3(o) to ensure the accuracy of—and consistency throughout—the Department’s own regulations.

The Department also finds it appropriate to make two other minor amendments to ensure that §§ 8.3(c) and 20.3(o) are identical. Specifically, the Department is (i) ensuring that both definitions explicitly mention the Northern Mariana Islands, and (ii) adopting uniform language for the reference to the States (“the fifty States”).

### **III. Classification**

#### **A. Administrative Procedure Act**

Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(a)(2), the provisions of the APA requiring notice of proposed rulemaking and the opportunity for public participation are inapplicable to this rule because it relates to “agency management or personnel or to public property, loans, grants, benefits, or contracts.” This rule modifies definitions set forth in 15 CFR parts 8 and 20, both of which establish nondiscrimination requirements in connection with Federal assistance. Additionally, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B), the Department finds good cause to waive notice of proposed rulemaking and the opportunity for public participation because public participation would be unnecessary. This rule only removes an outdated definition of the United States that no longer aligns with its current boundaries and territories. Public participation would not affect the legal and accurate definition of the United States.

#### **B. Executive Orders 12866, 14192, 13132**

The Office of Management and Budget has determined this rule is not significant pursuant to E.O. 12866. This rule is an E.O. 14192 deregulatory action. This rule does not contain policies having federalism implications as the term is defined in E.O. 13132.

#### **C. Regulatory Flexibility Act**

Because a notice of proposed rulemaking and an opportunity for public participation are not required to be given for this rule by 5 U.S.C. 553(a)(2), the analytical requirements of the

Regulatory Flexibility Act (5 U.S.C. 601 *et seq.*) are not applicable. Accordingly, no regulatory flexibility analysis is required, and none has been prepared.

**D. Executive Order 12250**

Pursuant to Executive Order 12250, the Department of Justice has the responsibility to “review . . . proposed rules . . . of the Executive agencies” implementing nondiscrimination statutes such as Title VI in order to identify those which are inadequate, unclear or unnecessarily inconsistent.” The Department of Justice has reviewed and approved this rule.

**E. Paperwork Reduction Act**

This rule will not impose additional reporting or recordkeeping requirements under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, 44 U.S.C. 3501, *et seq.*

**List of Subjects in 15 CFR Part 8**

Administrative practice and procedure, Civil rights, Equal employment opportunity, Government contracts, Grant programs, Grants administration.

**List of Subjects in 15 CFR Part 20**

Administrative practice and procedure, Civil rights, Grant programs, Public assistance programs.

Dated: April 13, 2026.

**Paul Dabbar,**  
*Deputy Secretary of Commerce.*

Accordingly, for the reasons set forth above, parts 8 and 20 of title 15 of the Code of Federal Regulations are amended as follows:

**PART 8 – NONDISCRIMINATION IN FEDERALLY ASSISTED PROGRAMS OF THE  
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE—EFFECTUATION OF TITLE VI OF THE CIVIL  
RIGHTS ACT OF 1964**

1. The authority citation for part 8 continues to read as follows:

**Authority:** Sec. 602, Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. 2000d-1).

2. Amend § 8.3 by revising paragraph (c) to read as follows:

**§ 8.3 Definitions**

\* \* \* \* \*

(c) *United States* means the fifty States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, American Samoa, Guam, Wake Island, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the territories and possessions of the United States.

\* \* \* \* \*

**PART 20 – NONDISCRIMINATION ON THE BASIS OF AGE IN PROGRAMS OR  
ACTIVITIES RECEIVING FEDERAL FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**

3. The authority citation for part 20 continues to read as follows:

**Authority:** Age Discrimination Act of 1975, as amended, 42 U.S.C. sec. 6101 *et seq.* and the government-wide regulations implementing the Act, 45 CFR Part 90.

4. Amend § 20.3 by revising paragraph (o) to read as follows:

**§ 20.3 Definitions.**

\* \* \* \* \*

(o) *United States* means the fifty States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, American Samoa, Guam, Wake Island, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the territories and possessions of the United States.