

May 13, 2024

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair, Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins
Vice Chair, Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
S-146A, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chairwoman, Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
H-307, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member, Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
1036 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

**SUBJECT: FUNDING FOR U.S. CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION BACKLOG
REDUCTION EFFORTS**

On behalf of the National Partnership for New Americans (NPNA), NALEO Educational Fund, Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA), and the 87 undersigned leading national, state, and local immigrant rights organizations, we write to urge the Appropriations Committees to ensure the inclusion of \$500 million in funding for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) backlog reduction efforts in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations bill. We also request an allocation of an additional \$100 million to meet the goals outlined in the agency's electronic processing plan as specified in the Emergency Stopgap USCIS Stabilization Act and an additional \$1.5 million for the agency to address Congressional reporting requirements.

The Need for Backlog Reduction

The gross backlog, as defined by the agency, is 'the number of cases pending within the government's control that exceed acceptable pending.'¹ Net backlog is the gross backlog minus

¹ United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. "Net Backlog and Frontlog FY2024 Q1."
https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/data/net_backlog_frontlog_fy2024_q1.xlsx.

any customer-induced delays and visa-unavailable cases.² According to recent data for the first quarter of the fiscal year 2024, the **net backlog of cases before USCIS was over 4 million cases.**³ To underscore the significance of the backlogs, in FY 2023, the median processing times were 33 months for family petitions and 52 months for U nonimmigrant visas.⁴ Processing times for Temporary Protected Status applications for Venezuelans stood at 14 months, renewal or replacement of employment authorization documents for pending asylum applicants averaged 15 months, and applications for advance parole travel documents took up to 15 months, depending on the service center.⁵ The significant backlogs have a detrimental impact on individuals and families awaiting immigration benefits. There is an urgent need for the allocation of funds to address these delays in immigration cases, including asylum and work permits adjudication.

Although the agency has made some progress in addressing the delays in processing and developing more efficient procedures, the efforts and resources dedicated to resolving these delays remain significantly inadequate.⁶ For instance, in FY 2023, USCIS completed 975,800 naturalization applications (N-400), administered the Oath of Allegiance to over 878,500 individuals, nearly eliminated the net backlog, and reduced the median processing time for naturalization applicants from 10.5 months to 6.1 months by the end of that fiscal year.⁷ However, there were still 400,445 pending N-400 cases as of December 31, 2023.⁸

Discretionary Funding Promotes More Modern and Efficient Case Processing

As the agency's overall backlog continues to grow, analysis by the agency on its progress identifies the key changes that helped improve the agency's ability to expedite processing and completion of cases. Among the factors reported, USCIS's advancement of electronic processing and online filing tools, as well as its hiring of personnel, helped alleviate the burden on the agency. This was made possible in part due to Congress' allocation of discretionary funding to USCIS through appropriations. It also demonstrates how discretionary funding for backlog reduction is an investment in more efficient and cost-effective case processing procedures, as well as technological advancements, that will help the agency continue to modernize how it provides immigration services.

In this connection, the recent fee schedule announced by USCIS, which went into effect on April 1, 2024, increased fees for various immigration services, incentivized electronic filing, broadened eligibility for fee waivers, and reduced fees for low-income immigrants. While aimed at addressing funding shortfalls and gaps in the agency, these fee hikes may further limit accessibility to immigration services, despite providing some relief to certain individuals. The

² Id.

³ Id.

⁴ United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. "Historic Processing Times." <https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/historic-pt>.

⁵ United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. "Processing Times." <https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/>.

⁶ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. "End of Year 2023." <https://www.uscis.gov/EOY2023>.

⁷ Id.

⁸ United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. "N400 Performance Data FY2024 Q1." https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/data/n400_performancedata_fy2024_q1.xlsx.

revenue the agency receives from these fees will help it keep pace with incoming cases and avoid future backlogs, but the agency will also continue to need Congressional support to implement technological advancements and expand its capacity to handle the overwhelming current backlog.

Congressional Support Will Help USCIS Achieve Important Electronic Processing Goals

In addition to funding backlog reduction, we respectfully urge the Appropriations Committees to allocate funding for USCIS to achieve its electronic filing and processing goals. In 2021, the agency outlined a comprehensive five-year project schedule to fulfill these objectives, as mandated by Congress in Section 4103 of the Emergency Stopgap USCIS Stabilization Act, Title I, Div. D of Public Law 116-159. An appropriation of \$100 million towards these efforts will significantly expedite the backlog elimination by enhancing the speed and efficiency of case processing. Moreover, it will establish a more streamlined and error-resistant system, benefiting both USCIS and immigrant applicants. Electronic processing boosts operational efficiency, enhances transparency, minimizes paperwork errors, and expedites decision-making processes. We believe that this funding is crucial for optimizing USCIS's efficiency and would lead to future cost savings for the agency.

Congressional Support Will Help USCIS Fulfill Important Reporting Requirements

We also request an additional \$1.5 million in funding for USCIS to fulfill its reporting requirements to Congress. This funding is crucial to ensure that USCIS can meet its statutory obligations to provide accurate, comprehensive, and timely reports on various aspects of its operations, including case processing times, backlog reduction efforts, resource utilization, and compliance with legislative mandates. Adequate funding for reporting enables USCIS to uphold transparency, accountability, and oversight, facilitating Congress's ability to make informed policy decisions and allocate resources effectively. By investing in robust reporting capabilities, USCIS can enhance its communication channels with Congress, stakeholders, and the public, fostering trust, credibility, and confidence in the agency's management and performance.

Conclusion

Ultimately, Congressional support for USCIS in FY 2025 would enhance USCIS' ability to improve the quality of its immigration services, enhance the efficiency of its case processing, and promote agency accountability. For these reasons, our organizations write to urge the Appropriations Committee to allocate \$500 million to address the severe backlogs, an additional \$100 million to meet the goals outlined in the agency's electronic processing plan as specified in the Emergency Stopgap USCIS Stabilization Act, and an additional \$1.5 million for the agency to address reporting requirements from Congress. Congressional support for all of these activities is of vital importance to applicants and their families, and businesses across the United States. It is also a needed investment to modernize how USCIS provides immigration services.

For more information, please contact ramya@partnershipfornewamericans.org, lcabral@naleo.org, and marisol.h@chirla.org.

Sincerely,

National

Afghans For A Better Tomorrow
African Communities Together
American Immigration Lawyers Association
Alianza Americas
Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC
ASISTA Immigration Assistance
Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project (ASAP)
Border Butterflies Project
CASA
Center for Gender & Refugee Studies
Center for Popular Democracy (CPD)
Center for Victims of Torture
Church World Service
Coalition on Human Needs
End SIJS Backlog Coalition
Freedom Network USA
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Human Rights First
Immigrant Legal Resource Center
Immigration Equality Action Fund
Immigration Hub
International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP)
Justice in Motion
Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)
Lawyers for Good Government
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum
National Education Association
National Employment Law Project
National Korean American Service & Education Consortium (NAKASEC)
National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (NNIRR)
Naturalization Network
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Refugees International
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
Social Workers for Immigration Justice
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
Tahirih Justice Center
The Advocates for Human Rights
TPS-DED AAC
U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI)
UnidosUS
Union for Reform Judaism
United We Dream

Washington Office on Latin America
Witness at the Border
Women's Refugee Commission
Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights

State and Local

Adhikaar for Social Justice and Human Rights
Americans for Immigrant Justice
Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Atlanta
Bonding Against Adversity
Boulder Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship
CATA - The Farmworker Support Committee
Catholic Charities Dallas
Central American Resource Center of Northern California - CARECEN SF
Chinese for Affirmative Action
Chinese Information and Service Center
Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking
District Attorney's Office - 20th JD (Boulder County)
Emerald Isle Immigration Center
Florida Immigrant Coalition
Florida Legal Services, Inc.
Food Justice DMV
GALEO Impact Fund
Global Cleveland
HIAS Pennsylvania
Hope Border Institute
Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
Immigrant Defenders Law Center
Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project
Jewish Family Service of San Diego
Jones Library ESL Center
Just Neighbors
Justice At Last
Justice at Work Pennsylvania
Latin American Coalition
Make the Road Nevada
Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition
Michigan Immigrant Rights Center
Oasis Legal Services
OneAmerica
Promise Arizona
Proyecto Vida Digna
Seattle Office of Immigrant & Refugee Affairs
Utah Health & Human Rights

Wind of the Spirit Immigrant Resource Center