

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.'<sup>1</sup> Net backlog is the gross backlog minus

---

<sup>1</sup> 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](https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/data/net_backlog_frontlog_fy2024_q1.xlsx).

any customer-induced delays and visa-unavailable cases.<sup>2</sup> 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**.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> However, there were still 400,445 pending N-400 cases as of December 31, 2023.<sup>8</sup>

### **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

---

<sup>2</sup> Id.

<sup>3</sup> Id.

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

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

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

<sup>7</sup> Id.

<sup>8</sup> 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](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](mailto:ramya@partnershipfornewamericans.org), [lcabral@naleo.org](mailto:lcabral@naleo.org), and [marisol.h@chirla.org](mailto: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