

## Chief Counsel



Lynden Melmed is USCIS Chief Counsel. The Office of the Chief Counsel was established in accordance with the Homeland Security Act of 2002 to provide specialized legal advice, opinions, determinations, regulations, and other assistance to the USCIS Director and to represent the agency in visa petition appeals before the Executive Office for Immigration Review.

With a highly skilled team of more than 100 attorneys nationwide, the Office of Chief Counsel (OCC) fields a wide range of inquiries. These inquiries concern immigrant and non-immigrant employment and family-based petitions, adjustment of status, adoptions, inadmissibility and waivers, naturalization, asylum and refugee status and contract and administrative matters. OCC provides comprehensive litigation support to the Department of Justice's Office of Immigration Litigation and the Offices of the U.S. Attorney. OCC's areas of responsibility include providing legal education and training to USCIS personnel, advising USCIS and Department of Homeland Security staff on legislative, regulatory and national security issues.

Since its formation in July 2003, the Office of Chief Counsel (OCC) has expanded and refined its headquarters and field structures to ensure maximum efficiency and responsiveness. At headquarters, OCC is divided into five expert divisions. Each division consists of a Chief, Deputy Chief and several Associate Counsel. Supporting and assisting these teams are OCC's Deputy Chief Counsel, Chief of Staff and Legislative Counsel. OCC headquarters and field attorneys meet on a regular basis with USCIS operational staff to discuss domestic and international policies and programs, and to clarify legal questions and positions. Likewise, OCC coordinates with other Department of Homeland Security components to define and address critical immigration-related issues.

The Office of Chief Counsel field structure includes four regional offices: Northeast, Southeast, Central and Western. Each includes a group of Associate Regional Counsel operating under the direction of a Regional and Deputy Regional Counsel. Together, these field attorneys provide timely, responsive and accurate legal advice and representation to USCIS personnel within their jurisdiction. The regional offices work closely with headquarters staff to communicate developments and trends and to formulate litigation strategies.

In addition to regional offices, the Office of Chief Counsel also has a Service Center Division that provides specialized support to service centers throughout the country.

The **Training and Knowledge Management Division** is dedicated to expanding the availability of resources, education and information technology within USCIS' legal and operational components. Through the Training and Knowledge Management Division, the Office of Chief Counsel has offered educational modules on the issuance of notices to appear, determining good moral character, effective writing, exercising discretion and adjudicating waivers.

As the Department of Homeland Security legal program responsible for supporting all USCIS operational functions, the Office of Chief Counsel works diligently to address USCIS' far-ranging legal needs by:

- o maintaining direct and simplified chains of command
- o matching client requests with subject matter experts
- o maximizing attorney productivity by balancing local and national requirements
- o mapping legal services to USCIS' mission and business lines
- o enhancing the technical knowledge, skills and experience of USCIS legal team
- o ensuring the timely delivery of complete, consistent and meaningful legal expertise to more than 15,000 USCIS employees worldwide



Office of the Chief Counsel assists USCIS with legal matters

USCIS

## Organizational Chart



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