

Congress of the United States
Washington, D.C. 20515

October 21, 2021

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary, Department of Homeland Security
245 Murray Lane, S.W.
Washington, DC 20528

The Honorable Ur Mendoza Jaddou
Director, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
20 Massachusetts Ave NW
Washington, DC 20529-2099

Dear Secretary Mayorkas and Director Mendoza Jaddou:

We write to commend the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) expansive policy changes regarding naturalization. In particular, we applaud the reinstatement of the 2008 civics test, continuous residence and physical presence improvements, guidance on naturalization and veterans, announcement of the Fiscal Year '21 Citizenship and Integration Grant program, and positive changes to the Request for Evidence and Notice of Intent to Deny policies for adjudications.

To build upon the progress thus far and help those who wish to naturalize, we believe you should continue and expand working towards making that process more accessible and affordable to eligible LPRs. There are approximately nine million lawful permanent residents (LPRs) – who are eligible for naturalization - that still face significant hurdles. Many LPRs have not initiated or completed the naturalization process because of barriers such as lack of information or lack of services to help navigate the application process or prepare for the exam, as well as the cost of the naturalization application. Once the application has been submitted, LPRs face additional hurdles including long wait times and extreme vetting. We have seen in previous years that LPRs remain vulnerable to losing their path to citizenship and can even be deported.

As members of Congress, we believe you should address these challenges as you further develop and implement naturalization policies. Naturalization must go hand in hand with the effort to legalize additional categories of immigrants to ensure the process is not a bottleneck to citizenship. Expanding access to naturalization can make our country more prosperous by enhancing the economic, civic and cultural contributions of LPRs. Therefore, we believe the following steps would help make the citizenship process more effective and fairer:

- **Provide information about the naturalization process and resources to potentially eligible populations.** We believe this information should be provided at adjustment of status approvals, with removal of conditions (I-751 and I-829 approvals), and with every

ten-year green card renewal (I-90) approval. Again, we commend the release of the Interagency Strategy for Promoting Naturalization and hope that this and other positive changes result from that strategy.

- **Fee Waivers for naturalization and immigration applications.** We believe USCIS should offer fee waivers for eligible applicants for naturalization and other immigration applicants. Waivers ensure naturalization and immigration status is accessible to everyone, not just those who can afford it, and will help tackle the massive backlog.
- **Implement remote interviews and oath ceremonies.** We believe USCIS should permit but not require remote interviews and oath ceremonies expeditiously during and after the pandemic to assist in balancing workload across offices and reducing processing times.
- **Appoint a Special Advisor to the Secretary of Homeland Security for Citizenship and Immigrant Integration.** We believe this advisor, preferably a naturalized citizen or expert, should be charged with working across the DHS immigration agencies and components that affect immigration to help ensure that all agency personnel respect and recognize the importance of positive interactions between stakeholders and government agencies.
- **Promote customer service and public engagement.** We believe USCIS should re-establish the USCIS Office of Public Engagement and the USCIS Office of Customer Service would help USCIS engage in regular dialogues and share information with community stakeholders.
- **Establish a process to solicit and accept donations for the Citizenship Gift and Bequest Account.** We believe the agency should fully use 8 U.S.C. § 1382 to obtain funding for grants and related activities; specifically, we believe it should revisit the feasibility of accepting private donations to support the USCIS Citizenship and Integration Grant Program. We understand that DHS has proposed examining this option in the Interagency Strategy to Promote Naturalization, and we strongly encourage the agency to use this opportunity.
- **Improve agency policy related to immigration data transparency and the naturalization process by providing more information and data.** We believe these statistics should include the naturalization exam pass rates by fiscal year and USCIS district; data on the annual number of fee waivers and reduced fees requested and approved for the Form N-400; data on the number of disability exceptions waivers (N-648s) requested and approved; and the cost breakdown used to determine individual fee levels.
- **Finally, please provide an update to Congress on:** (1) The current naturalization application backlog, both nationwide and at individual field offices; and (2) current naturalization application processing times, both nationwide and at individual field offices.

Thank you for your consideration of the above recommendations. We believe that we are a nation where all eligible immigrants can realize their dream of U.S. citizenship, and we look forward to working with you to achieve this important goal. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Amanda Hines from Congresswoman Torres' office at Amanda.Hines@mail.house.gov, Judith Teruya from Congresswoman Meng's office at Judith.Teruya@mail.house.gov, or Lanette Garcia from Congressman Garcia's office at Lanette.Garcia@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,



Norma J. Torres
Member of Congress



Grace Meng
Member of Congress



Jesus "Chuy" Garcia
Member of Congress

Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress

Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

Juan Vargas
Member of Congress

Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress

Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress

Tony Cárdenas
Member of Congress

Ruben Gallego
Member of Congress

Dina Titus
Member of Congress

Alan Lowenthal
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Salud Carbajal
Member of Congress

Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress

Dwight Evans
Member of Congress

Raúl Grijalva
Member of Congress

Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress

Jamaal Bowman
Member of Congress

Mondaire Jones
Member of Congress

Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress

Marie Newman
Member of Congress

Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

Lucille Roybal-Allard
Member of Congress

Linda T. Sánchez
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

Nikema Williams
Member of Congress



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

December 20, 2021

The Honorable Norma J. Torres
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Torres:

Thank you for your October 21, 2021 letter to the Department of Homeland Security. Secretary Mayorkas asked that I respond on his behalf, and I apologize for the delay in responding.

We appreciate your continued support for our efforts to promote citizenship and integration. As you know, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is conducting a comprehensive review of policies, regulations, forms, and operations to identify barriers that impede access to immigration benefits and naturalization. USCIS is also charged with making recommendations on how to remove these barriers and is considering the comments and suggestions in your letter.

As the Chair of the Naturalization Working Group (NWG), USCIS continues to collaborate with federal, state, and local officials to implement the NWG strategy for promoting naturalization. USCIS also works with state, city, academic, nongovernmental, and private sector organizations and businesses to provide information about the naturalization process and resources to eligible populations.

USCIS has taken a number of steps since the issuance of Executive Order 14012 to reduce barriers to naturalization and promote citizenship. We are advancing the *Interagency Strategy for Promoting Naturalization*, as detailed in the USCIS Naturalization Policies Factsheet and the Interagency Strategy Accomplishments Factsheet. Recent accomplishments include:

- Launching the Citizenship Public Education and Awareness Campaign and conducting national webinars for refugee resettlement and vulnerable population service providers, Veteran serving organizations, accredited representatives, and adult citizenship and English language educators;

- Developing and publishing useful online tools and access points for N-400 eligibility assessment and online filing;¹
- Granting fee waivers to eligible N-400 applicants, where appropriate, including approval of close to 146,000 N-400 fee waivers in FY 2021;²
- Accelerating testing and deployment of video technology to allow USCIS to conduct over 110,000 video-facilitated naturalization interviews to date, to support health and safety protocols and to allow interview workloads to be shared across offices;
- Clarifying and adjusting USCIS policies related to naturalization;³
- Hosting regular engagements with naturalization stakeholders and developing new resources for civics education, promotion, and community engagement;⁴
- Releasing \$10 million to 40 citizenship and integration grantees for FY 2022;⁵ and,
- Publishing numerous statistical reports including an overview of FY 2020 naturalization statistics,⁶ an updated analysis of naturalization trends,⁷ and an analysis of the characteristics of people who naturalized between FY 2015 and FY 2019.⁸

NWG partners also play an important role in our interagency strategy. For example, the Social Security Administration began airing a naturalization video Public Service Announcement in its waiting rooms on September 17, 2021 (Citizenship Day). The Department of Veterans Affairs is airing a similar video in its waiting rooms tailored for veterans and military members throughout the month of November. The U.S. Department of Agriculture is launching pilot projects with USCIS to reach historically underserved and more isolated communities. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement is working closely with USCIS to identify barriers to naturalize for its beneficiary populations (asylees, refugees, victims of trafficking, and unaccompanied minors, etc.) and to help promote naturalization.

While USCIS is experiencing limitations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, USCIS has returned to normal fiscal year processing levels for naturalization by decreasing the pending naturalization case queue by approximately 14% from January to September 2021. This represents USCIS staff ingenuity around interview and ceremony planning. USCIS remains committed to further reducing the volume of pending cases by exploring additional technology advancements and finding ways to streamline naturalization processing to maximize efficiency.

¹ See Naturalization Eligibility Tool available at <https://www.uscis.gov/citizenship-resource-center/learn-about-citizenship/naturalization-eligibility>.

² See www.uscis.gov/i-912 for additional information.

³ See USCIS Policy Manual Updates available at <https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/updates>.

⁴ See Resources for Educational Programs available at <https://www.uscis.gov/citizenship/resources-for-educational-programs>.

⁵ See USCIS Awards FY 2021 Citizenship and Integration Grants available at <https://www.uscis.gov/newsroom/news-releases/uscis-awards-fy-2021-citizenship-and-integration-grants>.

⁶ See <https://www.uscis.gov/citizenship-resource-center/naturalization-statistics>.

⁷ See <https://www.uscis.gov/newsroom/all-news/fact-sheets/trends-in-naturalization-rates-fy-2018-update>.

⁸ See <https://www.uscis.gov/newsroom/all-news/fact-sheets/characteristics-of-people-who-naturalized-between-fy-2015-and-fy-2019>.

Data and reports on naturalization from USCIS are available at <https://www.uscis.gov/tools/reports-and-studies>. In addition, processing times by form and field office, including forms for naturalization, are available at <https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times>.

Thank you again for your letter and interest in this important issue. The cosigners of your letter will receive a separate, identical response. Should you require any additional assistance, please have your staff contact the USCIS Office of Legislative Affairs at (240) 721-3801.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ur M. Jaddou", followed by a long horizontal line.

Ur M. Jaddou
Director