

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

February 15, 2022

Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas
Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr Ave SE
Washington, DC 20528-0525

Dear Secretary Mayorkas,

Before the Trump Administration's misguided changes to processing policies and the closure of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) offices due to COVID-19, visa renewals could be completed with diligence and effectiveness. While we are grateful for the immediate extension of eligible H-4 and L-2 visa applications, we are becoming increasingly concerned about the processing and Congressional response times at some USCIS service centers.

Over at least the last three months, our Congressional Offices have struggled to receive responses from the Nebraska Service Center (NSC). Many district caseworkers are waiting over 60 days without a response from federal liaisons, while others are being told that the average response time to their congressional inquiries for expedited visa requests exceeds 60 days. This is disheartening because when expedited visa requests are not processed in a timely manner, it can lead to dire situations for an immigrant and their family, potentially causing job loss, homelessness, financial losses to American businesses, and extreme anxiety for the immigrant and their family.

Though we understand that the pandemic has generally lengthened the response time, the other four service centers are generally answering congressional requests in a timely and efficient manner. These lengthened times are discouraging to our constituents who consider their Congressional Offices as their best point of contact for assistance with federal agencies' issues.

Many Congressional Offices and their caseworkers are being asked to consider the high volume of inquiries that the NSC is receiving and the limited resources they are expected to use to provide assistance. When necessary, we know that USCIS has transferred cases between the five service centers to balance the workload and promote timely processing. The last time USCIS transferred cases was back in October of 2020. In order to maintain the trust and efficient communication between caseworkers and federal agencies, is it possible to transfer some of the cases from the Nebraska Service Center to another center? If an internal transfer of cases is not possible, please let us know what resources are necessary from Congress to reduce processing time and the equal distribution of caseloads among USCIS staff.

Thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Al Lawson
Member of Congress



Stephanie Murphy
Member of Congress



Marilyn Strickland
Member of Congress



Joe Neguse
Member of Congress



Thomas R. Suozzi
Member of Congress



Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress



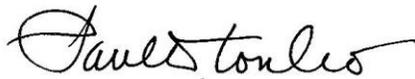
James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Mike Quigley
Member of Congress



Judy Chu
Member of Congress



Paul D. Tonko
Member of Congress



Mark Pocan
Member of Congress



Deborah Ross
Member of Congress



Julia Brownley
Member of Congress



Dina Titus
Member of Congress



Haley Stevens
Member of Congress

Cynthia Axne
Member of Congress

Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress

Katie Porter
Member of Congress

Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

Raja Krishnamoorthi
Member of Congress

Donald Payne Jr.
Member of Congress

Raul Grijalva
Member of Congress

Kathy Castor
Member of Congress

Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress

Brian Higgins
Member of Congress

Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress

Mike Thompson
Member of Congress

Mark Takano
Member of Congress

Byron Donalds
Member of Congress

Shontel M. Brown
Member of Congress

Ed Case
Member of Congress

Darren Soto
Member of Congress

Tom Malinowski
Member of Congress

Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress

Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress

Juan Vargas
Member of Congress

Rick Larsen
Member of Congress

Jamaal Bowman, Ed.D.
Member of Congress

/s/ André Carson
Member of Congress

David Price
Member of Congress

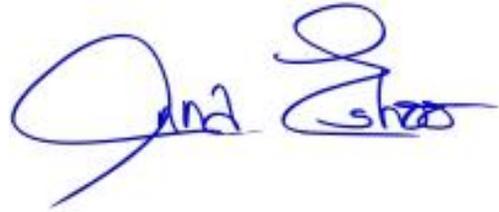
Diana DeGette
Member of Congress

Jason Crow
Member of Congress

Chrissy Houlahan
Member of Congress



Marie Newman
Member of Congress



Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress



Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress



Kim Schrier, M.D.
Member of Congress



Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress



Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



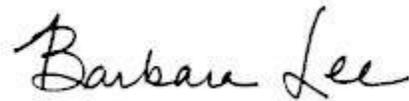
Ami Bera, M.D.
Member of Congress



Grace Meng
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



Pete Aguilar
Member of Congress



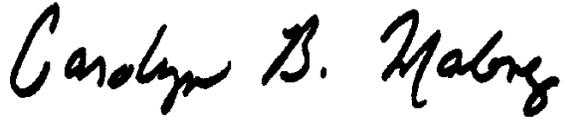
Lizzie Fletcher
Member of Congress



Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress



Steven Horsford
Member of Congress



Carolyn B. Maloney
Member of Congress



Jimmy Gomez
Member of Congress



Kathy Manning
Member of Congress



Lisa Blunt Rochester
Member of Congress



Madeleine Dean
Member of Congress

CC: Ur Mendoza Jaddou, Director, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services



**U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services**

March 23, 2022

The Honorable Al Lawson
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Lawson:

Thank you for your February 15, 2022, letter regarding delayed responses to congressional inquiries to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), specifically those responses from the USCIS Nebraska Service Center. Secretary Mayorkas asked that I respond on his behalf.

USCIS understands the importance of providing information in a timely manner to Members of Congress and their staff, and I am committed to improving our ability to do so despite our growing workload. As you are aware, USCIS processing times for applications and petitions, as well as responses to congressional inquiries, are longer than desired. USCIS recognizes the anxiety and hardships that delays may cause, and that is why tackling our backlogs and creating efficiencies is a priority for me.

As you note, the pandemic has presented challenges that have lengthened USCIS response times. In addition, USCIS is on pace to receive nearly 150,000 congressional inquiries this fiscal year, which would be nearly a 20 percent increase from previous years. For much of the pandemic, USCIS operated under a hiring freeze, thus limiting resources available to operations and congressional units. Nevertheless, USCIS is taking steps to mitigate the impact of these factors on backlogged adjudications and improve response times for congressional inquiries. To that end, we have:

- Lifted the hiring freeze and imposed an aggressive schedule to hire and train staff;
- Authorized overtime to focus on those lines of business that are backlogged; and
- Begun to digitize more workloads to increase efficiency and better align workloads with our workforce.

I am deeply thankful for congressional support, including your efforts to provide funds that are critical to the backlog reduction effort. We also appreciate the suggestions in your letter to improve response times, and our leadership team is taking them into consideration.

On December 6, 2021, USCIS notified congressional staff of the increase in inquiries and the likelihood of delays in responses, and provided some tips for congressional staff that can help alleviate the delays. USCIS sent this notice via GovDelivery. If your staff is not yet on the GovDelivery mailing list, they may subscribe by sending a request to usciscongressionalinquiries@uscis.dhs.gov.

Recognizing the interest in this matter, USCIS held a briefing for congressional staff on March 3, 2022. During that call, service center staff and members of the USCIS Office of Legislative Affairs provided updates on adjudicative and congressional response backlogs, as well as measures that USCIS is taking to reduce them. We will continue to find mechanisms to update congressional staff on our progress and continued challenges we are facing as we seek to reduce our backlogs and promote efficiencies as well as improve the experience of the individuals we serve.

Thank you again for your letter and interest in this 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 horizontal line extending to the right.

Ur M. Jaddou
Director