

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 28, 2022

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
301 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20528

The Honorable Ur Jaddou
Director
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
111 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Secretary Mayorkas and Director Ur Mendoza Jaddou:

We write to urge you to make improvements to the USCIS Contact Center, specifically the scheduling process for local field office appointments, to ensure it reflects USCIS's customer-oriented mission. To do so, the agency must ensure that the USCIS Contact Center is made more accessible to customers and that it implements and promotes additional avenues to self-schedule appointments efficiently. The shift from InfoPass to InfoMod for scheduling in person appointments has imposed a barrier, limiting customers' ability to obtain critical information or action on their cases. Customers have faced difficulty navigating the three-tiered process through the USCIS Contact Center as they experience extensive wait times, unreasonable callback windows, and are required to restart the process if their call is dropped, or they are not able to answer return calls from USCIS.

In addition, as you continue to assess existing USCIS policies, it is important to reconsider and rescind agency policies that are creating barriers to customer service and efficient adjudication of cases. For example, the agency policy preventing law firm staff from submitting service requests or scheduling appointments pose a huge inconvenience when attorneys of record are unavailable to field a call. Even when these individuals are available, it requires several hours spent either on hold, or waiting for a call back from the agency, which can come at any moment over days or even weeks. Additionally, the criteria for issues warranting in-person appointments through InfoMod is not publicly available, leading customers to be unsure of whether they will be granted an appointment before beginning the call process. [An August 2021 GAO report](#) found that from fiscal years 2015 to 2020, USCIS' pending caseload grew approximately 85%. Expanding access to effective sources of information providers and self-scheduling mechanisms would reduce burden on agency staff and customers and would streamline processes to effectively decrease caseload and ensure proper adjudication of cases.

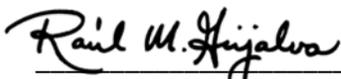
Therefore, we believe that USCIS should reinstate an online self-scheduling system that would allow for scheduling and rescheduling appointments without having to call the USCIS Contact Center to speak to an official. This would allow customers the ability to schedule timely appointments and obtain accurate resolution on cases without adding to the workload of USCIS officials. While we understand that USCIS had concerns about the prior system using unnecessary resources, we urge USCIS to think creatively about how online self-scheduling can meet the needs of both the agency and stakeholders.

Until such recommendation is implemented, we believe the following steps would help make the customer service system and InfoMod scheduling process more effective:

- **Provide accurate and accommodating callback windows for customers submitting requests through InfoMod.** The current callback time stands at 24-72 hours from the initial call, which is unnecessarily vague and often inaccurate. If the call is missed, customers must restart the process with InfoMod, thereby ensuring that they will not obtain necessary information or a resolution promptly. USCIS officials must work with customers to provide shorter, scheduled callback windows with accommodating time frames during business hours.
- **Change internal policy to allow law firm staff other than the attorney on record to make requests through the USCIS Contact Center.** Law firm staff often have greater availability than the attorney of record and can answer case-specific questions. Allowing law firm staff to step in when follow up is needed and the attorney of record is unavailable, prevents delays in the case, reduces agency inefficiencies and decreases costs for applicants.
- **Make criteria used to grant appointments through InfoMod public.** Providing this information will educate customers on what issues they are able to schedule appointments for and reduce the number of appointment requests made.
- **Offer walk-in availability for urgent requests at local USCIS offices.** Walk-in availability is crucial for emergencies and time-sensitive issues such as demonstrating immigration status, travel, fee-in motions, urgent follow ups, and more. Sole reliance on InfoMod does not guarantee that emergencies will be resolved promptly as there may be miscommunication between customers and representatives and the three-tiered system is excessively time consuming.

Thank you for your consideration of the above recommendations. We look forward to working with you to create an efficient and effective Contact Center to ensure that delays in information requests are prevented and cases are adjudicated in a timely manner. Our nation has a commitment to welcoming immigrants and these recommendations are a critical step toward achieving that goal.

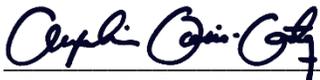
Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress



Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress



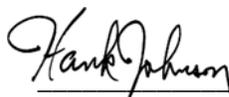
Marilyn Strickland
Member of Congress



Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress



Henry C. "Hank" Johnson
Member of Congress



María Elvira Salazar
Member of Congress



Gerald E. Connolly
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Ann Kirkpatrick
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Anthony G. Brown
Member of Congress

/S/

André Carson
Member of Congress



Jim Costa
Member of Congress



Marie Newman
Member of Congress



Joe Neguse
Member of Congress



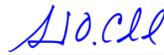
Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress



C. A. Dutch Ruppertsberger
Member of Congress



Donald M. Payne, Jr.
Member of Congress



Salud O. Carbajal
Member of Congress



Michael F. Q. San Nicolas
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Melanie Stansbury
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Tony Cárdenas
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James P. McGovern
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Jesús "Chuy" García
Member of Congress



Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress



Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress



Darren Soto
Member of Congress



Sylvia R. Garcia
Member of Congress



Julia Brownley
Member of Congress



Linda T. Sánchez
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Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress



Mark Takano
Member of Congress



Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress



Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress



Albio Sires
Member of Congress



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

April 18, 2022

The Honorable Raúl M. Grijalva
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Grijalva:

Thank you for your February 28, 2022 letter to the Department of Homeland Security. Secretary Mayorkas asked that I respond on his behalf, and I apologize for the delay in responding.

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) values customer service, and it is one of my top priorities as Director. We continue to develop new customer service features and are fully committed to using a combination of technological advancements and procedural efficiencies to offer the most up-to-date resources and improve the experience for those we serve. I recognize that we still have much work to do in this area, but I want to share some of the progress the agency has made during my tenure to date.

First, we have continued to expand and enhance the self-help tools available to applicants, petitioners, and requestors online and through the USCIS Contact Center with the goal of providing more timely service and better responsiveness.

We have made some changes over the past few years to how we schedule in-person appointments at field offices under an initiative known as Information Services Modernization (InfoMod). Under this model, individuals request an appointment through the USCIS Contact Center, which determines whether in-person service is required or if the individual can obtain what they need by phone, email, or live chat. Based on stakeholder concerns raised during public engagement events, as well as complaints received at the Contact Center from customers frustrated by their inability to find an available appointment, USCIS concluded that the previous self-scheduling process for in-person appointments was not efficient for either the customer or the agency. Through engagements and data gathering, we found that more than 80 percent of the self-scheduled appointments available were scheduled by attorneys and accredited representatives. This left very few available appointments for pro se applicants, petitioners, and requestors who may have required in-person support. Additionally, applicants, petitioners, and requestors often found that appointments were not available for long periods of time, and they could not schedule an appointment even if there was an emergency. Those with an urgent need

for assistance would visit a field office without an appointment and without the assurance that their request could be accommodated.

By moving the scheduling of in-person appointments to the USCIS Contact Center, the agency can ensure that individuals who have urgent appointment needs are assisted, such as those who need to secure evidence of status for financial/employment reasons or for emergency travel. Right now, we are working on appointment scheduling, so that a caller who was not able to find help from our online tools can make an appointment to speak to an Immigration Services Officer at the Contact Center. This scheduling service will let an applicant choose a day and time to speak to a Contact Center Officer. Additionally, this process has allowed the agency to shift more resources to processing applications, as many services that customers sought do not require in-person assistance and can be handled by phone, email, or live chat.

Next, we are also in the process of exploring additional innovations and technology to improve customer experience and the efficiency of the USCIS Contact Center overall. For example, we appreciate your recommendation regarding a “text-ahead” feature. Since October 2021, we have leveraged GovDelivery to implement an interim “text-ahead” solution that informs customers that they will receive a call from an officer at the USCIS Contact Center within one-to-two business days. The USCIS Contact Center makes at least two attempts to reach the customer; if the customer misses both calls, the inquiry will be prioritized if the customer calls again.

Over the next year, we plan to implement a formal “text-ahead” feature that will contain case-specific information (for ease of reference by attorneys and accredited representatives with multiple cases and, by extension, multiple pending inquiries with USCIS) and give a shorter, more predictable call-back window. As we work to enable online filing of all USCIS forms by 2026, as mandated by Congress in Section 4103 of the Emergency Stopgap USCIS Stabilization Act, more customers will have access to a suite of self-help tools via their online account.

We are very close to the creation of a stakeholder inquiry mailbox. Rather than being a direct mailbox to Service Center Operations or Field Operations, it will instead be an inquiry account that will be managed by a specialized tier of Contact Center Officers, Community Relations Officers, and Public Engagement Officers.

We also recognize and appreciate your recommendations to modify internal policies to allow all law firm staff, not just the attorney of record, to make requests through the USCIS Contact Center. Please know that current legal and privacy policies require that the USCIS Contact Center only engage with attorneys or representatives as indicated on the Form G-28, Notice of Entry of Appearance as Attorney or Accredited Representative. We understand that allowing other employees of the same firm as the G-28 representative to interact with the USCIS Contact Center regarding a particular case could improve efficiency and customer experience, and we are actively reviewing the policy.

Finally, reinvigorating our public engagement efforts is another key priority for me. We have been engaging with the public regarding the USCIS Contact Center in recent months, both at the national level in cooperation with the CIS Ombudsman, and at the local level in

conjunction with our district and field offices. We will continue to gather feedback from the public on how we can further improve customer experience and look forward to planning an engagement in the next few months to share what we have been implementing to date.

Thank you again for your letter, interest, and recommendations regarding this important issue. We will continue to work collaboratively with Congress and other stakeholders to reduce undue burdens on those seeking immigration benefits and break down barriers to increase access to the immigration system.

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 flourish.

Ur M. Jaddou
Director