

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0305

March 10, 2021

Tracy Renaud
Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Director
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
5900 Capital Gateway Dr.
Camp Springs, MD 20746

Dear Ms. Renaud:

On March 1, 2021, Secretary Mayorkas stated that the Department of Homeland Security “did not have the personnel, policies, procedures, or training to administer [humanitarian] laws.”¹ I was intrigued by this statement, given the fact that USCIS recently hired 500 new asylum officers.² This hiring surge brought the number of USCIS asylum officers to the highest number in the agency’s history. Additionally, it is my understanding that asylum officers routinely receive training to ensure that they are prepared to conduct interviews and adjudicate asylum claims.

In order to better understand the Secretary’s statement, I request that you provide me with the number of USCIS asylum officers for each of the past ten fiscal years, as well as the training requirements for asylum officers and a copy of training materials used by asylum officers that have been developed since January 20, 2021.

Thank you in advance for the requested information. I look forward to reviewing the materials so that I can better understand Secretary Mayorkas’ statement and any gaps in USCIS resources.

Sincerely,



Andy Biggs
Member of Congress

¹ <https://www.c-span.org/video/?509417-1/white-house-daily-briefing>

² <https://www.uscis.gov/news/news-releases/cuccinelli-announces-uscis-fy-2019-accomplishments-and-efforts-to-implement-president-trumps-goals>



March 26, 2021

The Honorable Andy Biggs
 U.S. House of Representatives
 Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Biggs:

Thank you for your March 10, 2021 letter to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

In the letter, you referenced Secretary Mayorkas' recent remarks during a press briefing. Secretary Mayorkas stated his dedication to building an orderly, humane, and safe immigration process, and he also voiced his concerns with the prior administration's policies. He emphasized the need to rebuild the nation's immigration system. The U.S. immigration system involves close collaboration between the President, Congress, government agencies - including many of the components within the Department of Homeland Security, as well as the Department of State, Department of Justice, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Labor – along with many others.

You inquired about the staffing and training requirements for USCIS asylum officers. The chart below summarizes USCIS asylum officer staffing from fiscal years 2012 through 2021.¹

Authorized Asylum Officer Staffing for fiscal years 2012 – 2021

Fiscal Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Asylum Officer Staffing	271	371	373	425	533	625	686	769	769	769

Actual Asylum Officer Staffing for fiscal years 2012 – 2021

Fiscal Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Onboard Asylum Officer Staff	238	245	337	349	500	546	542	552	837	785

¹ In FY20 and FY21, onboard asylum officer staffing exceeded the authorized asylum officer level during an aggressive USCIS hiring initiative in which USCIS aimed to achieve 100% onboard staffing. To achieve this goal, the recruitment process required USCIS to make extra selections for the asylum officer position in order to account for attrition and other factors. These extra selections resulted in USCIS onboarding asylum officers above the authorized level, which is why the onboard number is above the authorized level in FY20 and FY21. The onboard asylum officer level has been decreasing toward the authorized level, as expected, during the normal course of attrition. While this hiring initiative resulted in the onboarding of asylum officers slightly above the authorized level for this position, the onboard staffing level for the directorate overall was under the authorized level.

Honorable Andy Biggs

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In terms of training requirements for asylum officers, pursuant to the regulatory requirement at 8 C.F.R. § 208.1(b), standardized training is a condition of employment for new asylum officers. New asylum officers receive training in such areas as international and U.S. case law and sources of authority, eligibility for asylum, nexus to protected grounds, eliciting testimony, country of origin information, fraud detection and prevention, and national security vetting. Officers are also trained on conducting credible fear and reasonable fear screenings and making determinations pursuant to the Convention Against Torture. No new lesson plans have been developed since January 20, 2021.

Thank you again for your letter and interest in these important issues. We look forward to working with Congress and our partners in developing a better immigration system. 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 that reads "Tracy L. Renaud". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tracy L. Renaud
Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Director