



Frequently Asked Questions

Contacting U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and Additional U.S. Government Entities for Assistance with Immigration Inquiries

The USCIS Office of Legislative Affairs (OLA) recognizes the importance of being accessible to you, our congressional partners, as you assist your constituents. We offer these answers to frequently asked questions to ensure that your immigration-related inquiries are answered by the appropriate government agency as rapidly as possible.

I have an immigration inquiry. When should I contact USCIS?

USCIS is the principal government agency within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) that oversees lawful immigration to the United States and the adjudication of benefits applications within the United States. We are not, however, the only entity with jurisdiction over lawful immigration. Common topics of inquiries over which USCIS has jurisdiction include the following immigration issues (in alphabetical order):

- Adjudication of affirmative application for Asylum (performed within the United States)
- Adjudication of applications for Employment Authorization
- Adjudication of Refugee Status applications (performed abroad)
- Adjustment of status to Permanent Resident
- EB-5 Immigrant Investor Program
- Employment-based Immigration Petitions
- Extension and change of non-immigrant status
- Family-based Immigration Petitions
- Fraud Detection (marriage fraud in conjunction with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE))
- Humanitarian Parole
- Intercountry Adoptions
- Naturalization and Certificates of Citizenship
- Permanent Resident Cards (Green Cards)
- Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE)
- Temporary Protected Status (TPS)
- Verification for employment (E-Verify Program)
- Waivers of Inadmissibility for Immigrant Visa applications

How can I submit inquiries to USCIS?

Submit case inquiries and policy inquiries through the [Congressional Web Portal](#).¹ The Congressional Liaison located in your *local USCIS Field Office* is often your best initial contact. This Liaison should serve as your primary point of contact for assistance with your casework inquiries. The Congressional Liaison Contact Information page on www.uscis.gov/congress provides a contact list for all USCIS offices.

USCIS OLA prefers to receive inquiries via the [Congressional Web Portal](#), but can also receive inquiries via telephone, fax, email, or in writing.

Are there other ways to find case information?

USCIS offers several [online tools and resources](#) that are easily accessible to the public. Individuals may find information on processing times for various forms by visiting the [Check Case Processing Times](#) page or if you have a valid receipt number, check the status of a case using our [Case Status Online](#) tool.

When should I reach out directly to the USCIS OLA Headquarters Unit in Washington, D.C.?

Contact OLA Headquarters only when you have:

- Inquiries where prior attempts to obtain assistance from local USCIS Congressional Liaisons were unsuccessful; and
- Inquiries regarding the Congressional Web Portal.

What information should I provide to USCIS OLA when I submit a case inquiry?

Please refer to the “Congressional Casework” tab on uscis.gov/congress. There you will find information on the procedures for submitting congressional inquiries, including a sample privacy release which is also included in this package for reference purposes. The privacy release elicits the information USCIS requires to be submitted with case inquiries to allow our liaisons to respond to your offices as quickly and completely as possible. The Congressional Web Portal also prompts you for information that is necessary for processing an inquiry. Please remember to include the following important items when submitting your inquiry:

- The privacy release ***must*** be signed by the individual who is the subject of the inquiry. Please note that a third party’s name should not appear in the privacy release.
- As stated in 6 CFR 5.21(d) (1), the privacy release accompanying the congressional inquiry should contain the full name and date of birth of the subject of the records. However, if the petitioner who signed the privacy release is a corporate entity, then there is no need to provide date of birth or place of birth information related to the corporate entity or the person signing on behalf of the corporate entity.

¹ The Congressional Web Portal is for the use of congressional staff, and is only accessible to users operating at a congressional web address; it cannot be accessed from private web addresses.

- As required by 8 CFR 103.2(b)(3), if the privacy release is written in any language other than English, it should be accompanied by an English language translation written by any person who can certify that he or she is competent to translate the written foreign language into English. The privacy release document should be addressed specifically to USCIS. The privacy release document **should not** contain a Social Security number, but it **should** include the USCIS Receipt number and/or A-number pertaining to the immigration case in question.
- For international cases or refugee cases, the privacy release should include the Department of State case number or refugee case number.
- For humanitarian parole cases, the privacy release should contain the humanitarian parole case number.
- For all cases, please provide the form number(s) in question related to the inquiry as well as a brief description of the inquiry.

Why is a privacy release needed?

The Privacy Act of 1974 in addition to other laws and DHS regulations and policies prohibit USCIS from disclosing personally identifying information to a third party without written consent from the individual whose information is being sought. The release must be signed by that individual.

A spouse, other relative, or an attorney or authorized representative (even when there is a G-28 on file with USCIS) cannot authorize the release of information on behalf of the individual.

Even if the individual is outside the United States, there must still be a release signed by that individual. Common examples where this is the situation include *approved* Form I-730, *Refugee/Asylee Relative Petition*, when the inquiry concerns the beneficiary's processing or interview, and Form I-601, *Application for Waiver of Grounds of Inadmissibility*, when the spouse is in the United States but the I-601 applicant, who must sign the release, is not.

Inquiries requesting general information or non-case-specific information do not require a privacy release.

Under normal circumstances, when should I expect to receive an initial response/acknowledgment from USCIS OLA regarding my inquiry?

- Web Portal Inquiries: Immediately on submitting the inquiry.
- Telephonic Inquiries: Within 1 business day of receipt.
- Email Inquiries: Within 5 business days of receipt.
- Fax Inquiries: Within 30 business days of receipt.
- Written: Within 30 business days of receipt.

USCIS OLIA strives to complete inquiries as soon as possible. While some inquiries will be fully resolved within the times outlined above, these expectations relate specifically to when OLIA will provide an initial response to your inquiry.

What is the current USCIS operating environment considering the COVID-19 pandemic?

The safety of our workforce and all those who visit our facilities remains our priority. We have enacted precautions to prevent the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) in our facilities. Applicants and petitioners are instructed on the following:

- You may not enter a USCIS facility if you:
 - Have any symptoms of COVID-19, including recently developed cough, fever, difficulty breathing, changes in smell or taste or fatigue (list is not all-inclusive);
 - Have been in close contact with anyone known or suspected to have COVID-19 in the last 14 days;
 - Have been instructed to self-quarantine or self-isolate by a health care provider, public health authority or government agency within the last 14 days; or
 - Are awaiting the results of a COVID-19 test.
- You may not enter the facility more than 15 minutes before your appointment (30 minutes for naturalization ceremonies).
- We will provide hand sanitizer at entry points.
- You must wear face coverings that cover both the mouth and nose inside USCIS facilities. We do not allow masks with exhaust valves, neck gaiters or bandanas. If you do not have an acceptable face covering, we may provide one or ask you to reschedule your appointment.
- There will be markings and physical barriers in the facility; you should pay close attention to these signs to ensure you follow social distancing guidelines.
- You may also have to answer health screening questions before entering a facility.
- We encourage you to bring your own black or blue ink pens.

Appointment notices sent to applicants and petitioners will include more instructions for visiting USCIS facilities. For more information on visiting a USCIS facility, see our [USCIS Visitor Policy](#) page and the [web alert](#).

For additional guidance, please see the [USCIS Response to COVID-19](#).

I have an inquiry for an immigration-related issue that does not fall within the outlined jurisdiction of USCIS. Where should I direct these inquiries?

Multiple U.S. federal government departments and agencies are responsible for immigration issues that fall outside of the jurisdiction of USCIS. The following non-exhaustive list provides general overviews of these entities, including a short list of their responsibilities. Included in this package is a separate point-of-contact list for these entities.

DHS, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) – CBP has a primary mission of keeping terrorists and their weapons out of the United States. It also has a responsibility for securing and facilitating trade and travel while enforcing hundreds of U.S. regulations, including immigration and drug laws. Contact CBP if your inquiry relates to the following topics:

- Admissions (and refusals) at ports of entry (POE)
- Border Patrol and POE apprehensions
- [Electronic System for Traveler Access \(ESTA\)](#)
- Names in databases/lists
- Nonimmigrant visa waiver
- Parole at a POE
- Trade NAFTA (TN) status
- Visa Waiver Program (VWP)

DHS, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) – ICE is the principal investigative arm of DHS and the second largest investigative agency in the Federal Government. Contact ICE if your inquiry relates to the following topics:

- Deportation/removal issues
- Detention of aliens
- Detention of asylum seekers
- Homeland Security Investigations
- Prevention of Marriage Fraud (in conjunction with USCIS)
- Prosecution in removal proceedings
- Significant public benefit parole
- Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS)
- Visa security program

Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) – HHS is responsible for refugee resettlement after a refugee has been admitted to the United States. HHS also ensures care and housing of unaccompanied alien children (UAC).

Department of State (DOS) – DOS is the principal U.S. government entity for conducting American foreign policy. The Bureau of Consular Affairs within DOS is responsible for passports, visas, and children’s issues. DOS produces the Visa Bulletin, which summarizes the availability of immigrant numbers during each calendar month, as well as the numerical limitation of visas and the Diversity Lottery program. DOS also plays a role in refugee issues. Contact DOS if your inquiry relates to the following topics:

- Visas (issuance and denial)
- Passport applications
- Consular office appointments
- Children’s issues; child abduction cases
- Assistance to American Citizens located overseas

Department of Justice, Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) Office of Legislative and Public Affairs including the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) – EOIR, under delegated authority from the Attorney General, conducts immigration court proceedings, appellate reviews, and administrative hearings. Contact EOIR if your inquiry relates to the following topics:

- Immigration Court proceedings
- De novo Asylum proceedings (after affirmative asylum is denied by a USCIS Asylum Office)
- BIA

Office of Special Counsel for Immigration-Related Unfair Employment Practices (OSCIRUEP) – If your constituent has a question about discrimination in hiring, firing, or recruitment or referral for a fee that is based on an individual's national origin or citizenship status, contact OSCIRUEP. The Office should also be contacted on issues of unfair documentary practices during the employment eligibility verification (Form I-9) process, as well as any alleged retaliation or intimidation.

Department of Labor (DOL) Office of Congressional and Intergovernmental Affairs – Contact DOL on issues related to the foreign labor certification process as well as Labor Condition Application certifications, which must be filed with USCIS with certain non-immigrant or immigrant employment-based petitions.