

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 29, 2018

The Honorable L. Francis Cissna
Director
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Via E-Mail

Dear Director Cissna:

We write to request that U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) commit additional resources and increase capacity to achieve an average processing time for naturalization applications of six months or less. USCIS has achieved this goal in the recent past, and the agency must take the steps necessary to do so again. Facilitating American citizenship for qualified applicants is one of the agency's most critical missions. The recent and sizable expansion of the naturalization backlog undermines public trust and must be meaningfully addressed.

As you know, USCIS faces an unprecedented backlog of naturalization applications. The agency's latest quarterly report (FY 2018, 1st Quarter) shows that USCIS has 729,400 pending N-400 applications, which represents a 100 percent increase in pending applications in a two-year period. Prior to this large expansion in the backlog, immigrants aspiring to become American citizens experienced a processing time of approximately 6 months or less. Now the average wait for processing is approximately 11 months nationwide, with average wait times as high as 15 to 16 months in certain field offices, such as Dallas. Given that applicants pay USCIS \$725 in fees to apply for citizenship, these waiting times are unacceptable and are not commensurate with the corresponding influx of fee receipts.

With these concerns in mind, we ask that your agency answer the following questions in writing:

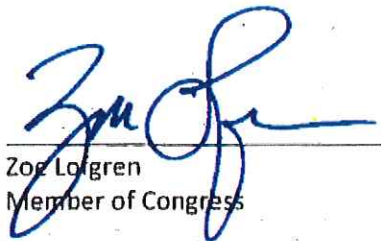
1. Assuming that USCIS continues to aspire to process N-400 applications in 6 months or less, what specific efforts are underway to achieve this goal?
2. If the agency's processing goal is no longer 6 months or less, please explain the agency's current goal and the rationale for changing it.

3. Please explain the disparity in processing times among field offices and what specific actions USCIS is taking or will take to ensure equal or nearly equal processing times across the country.
4. It is our understanding that USCIS at this time does not plan to grow its office space or hire and train additional adjudicators to help reduce N-400 processing times. Please explain why this is the case and how you will address the backlog in the absence of additional adjudicators.
5. With regard to staffing resources, what other change or investment is the agency taking or planning to take (such as overtime, staff retention, staff training, etc.) to improve processing times?


We appreciate that USCIS, in response to an increase in naturalization applications, hired and trained additional staff in 2017 that resulted in a seven percent increase in field office capacity. However, the agency has continued to face greater numbers of N-400 filings than anticipated over a sustained period. And while those filings may fluctuate from month to month, or quarter to quarter, we continue to see in our own Congressional districts a keen interest among our constituents to become American citizens and fully integrate into our nation and her communities. The agency clearly needs to invest further resources and increase staff to expand capacity and return processing times to the agency's stated goal of six months or less.

Thank you, and we look forward to your prompt response.

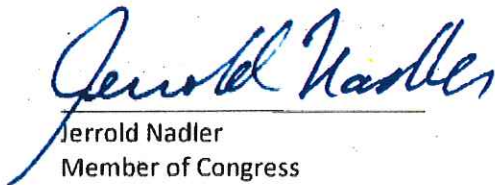
Sincerely,



Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress



Luis V. Gutiérrez
Member of Congress



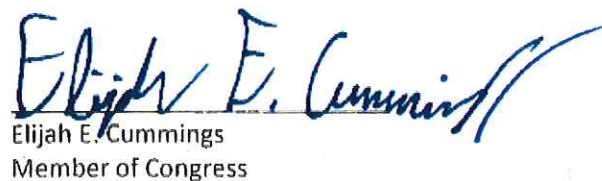
Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress



Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress



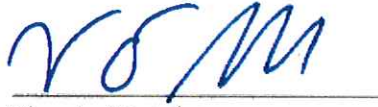
Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



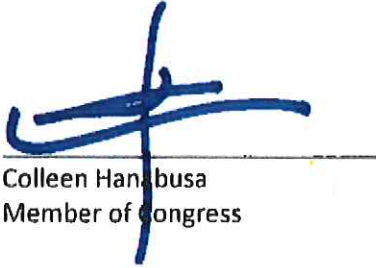
Elijah E. Cummings
Member of Congress



Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress



Vicente Gonzalez
Member of Congress



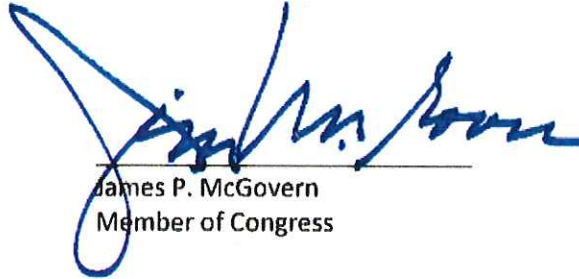
Colleen Hanabusa
Member of Congress



Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress



Filemon Vela Jr.
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Ro Khanna
Member of Congress



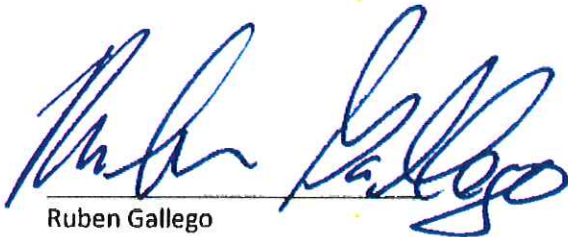
J. Luis Correa
Member of Congress



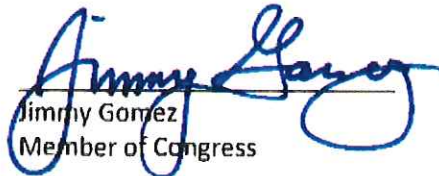
Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress



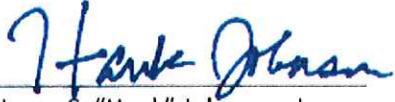
Brendan F. Boyle
Member of Congress



Ruben Gallego
Member of Congress



Jimmy Gomez
Member of Congress



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



Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



Nanette Diaz Barragan
Member of Congress



Judy Chu
Member of Congress



Mark Takano
Member of Congress



Bill Foster
Member of Congress



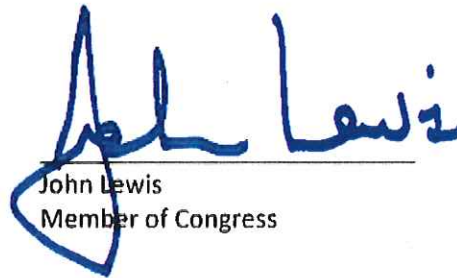
Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan
Member of Congress



Linda T. Sanchez
Member of Congress



Ted W. Lieu
Member of Congress



John Lewis
Member of Congress



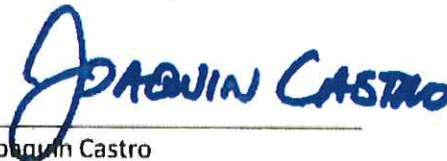
Michelle Lujan Grisham
Member of Congress



Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress



Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress



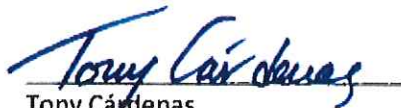
Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress



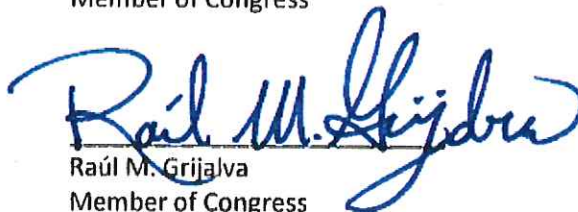
Michael E. Capuano
Member of Congress



Darren Soto
Member of Congress



Tony Cardenas
Member of Congress



Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress



Juan Vargas
Member of Congress



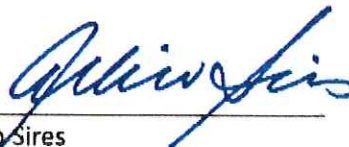
Hakeem S. Jeffries
Member of Congress




Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress



Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress



Albio Sires
Member of Congress



Gwen Moore
Member of Congress



Peter Welch
Member of Congress




Carolyn B. Maloney
Member of Congress



José E. Serrano
Member of Congress



Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



Steve Cohen
Member of Congress



Frederica Wilson
Member of Congress



Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress



Gene Green
Member of Congress



Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress



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

August 6, 2018

The Honorable Zoe Lofgren
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Lofgren:

Thank you for your June 29, 2018 letter regarding Form N-400, Application for Naturalization processing times. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) remains committed to timely and accurate adjudications. Additionally, we remain focused on process improvement and employee development while at the same time combatting instances of fraud, abuse, and other activities threatening the integrity of our nation's immigration system.

As the USCIS report you cite in your letter notes, we have experienced an increase in the number of pending naturalization applications and a subsequently elevated N-400 application cycle time. Both of these are the result of higher than projected application receipts in Fiscal Year (FY) 2017. Projected volume for FY 2017 was 853,292 and actual receipts were 986,460 which is 13.5 percent higher than we anticipated. Unlike the previous presidential election cycle where receipts dropped by 14 percent in the year following the election, they actually increased from FY 2016 to FY 2017.

Despite the increase in receipts over the last 2 years, USCIS has been able to increase N-400 application completion levels over those prior to FY 2016 without sacrificing the quality of our adjudications. In FY 2016, USCIS adjudicated approximately 829,000 naturalization applications and in FY 2017, USCIS adjudicated approximately 790,000 of them. These numbers are in line with previous fiscal years, and both years' totals are above the average for the 5 prior years.

USCIS remains focused on meeting a processing goal of 5 months for the Form N-400. We have not changed this goal and have continued to leverage available resources to improve wait times. Given the increase in filings in the recent past, reaching this goal in FY 2018 is simply not possible. We continue to add staff and seek to maximize use of our existing facilities where possible. In the last 3 fiscal years, USCIS Field Operations Directorate (FOD) has increased its use of overtime by approximately 65 percent. At the same time, we have expanded the authorized workforce for FOD by approximately 18 percent since FY 2015, and currently 96 percent of our authorized staffing positions are filled. We have initiated process redesign efforts to lower cycle times by identifying process efficiencies and quality enhancements and shifted adjudication priorities to address high priority caseloads. Additionally, in the past 2 years, USCIS opened 2 new field offices in Montgomery, Alabama and Nashville, Tennessee and has expanded office space at 10 existing facilities.

The Honorable Zoe Lofgren

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We recognize the disparities in wait times across the country that you mention. Although there will always be some level of regional or local differences in wait times, our internal production planning models are built to ensure that we align our resources to minimize the disparities. We are currently looking at expanding or targeting the use of overtime and temporary personnel re-assignments for offices that are experiencing larger backlogs in an effort to more closely align processing times for N-400 applications across the country.

Thank you for your letter and interest in this important issue. The co-signers of your letter will receive separate, identical responses. Should you require any additional assistance, please have your staff contact the USCIS Office of Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs at (202) 272-1940.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L. Francis Cissna". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

L. Francis Cissna
Director