

Congress of the United States  
Washington, DC 20510

July 3, 2019

Kenneth Cuccinelli  
Acting Director  
United States Citizenship and Immigration Services  
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Acting Director Cuccinelli,

We write to express concern regarding U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' (USCIS) new policy of transferring cases out of its busiest offices. Although we appreciate the effort to more expeditiously process long-pending cases, we are concerned about the burden placed on individuals who may struggle to get time off from work, arrange child care, or obtain funds to make long journeys to other USCIS offices.

We have heard from constituents that scheduling interviews at other USCIS offices creates lengthier trips of up to three to five hours, increasing transportation cost and the likelihood that constituents will have to take time off from work. For instance, a trip to Yakima from Seattle on public transportation would require an overnight stay, because round trip and departure options are limited. Furthermore, we have heard concerns from stakeholders that traveling out of district will considerably increase individuals' legal fees. Simultaneously, lower-income constituents who often do not have financial means to pay for child care will be further burdened by a lack of accessibility. Employment partners have raised concerns that constituents who work low-wage jobs cannot afford to take off work as it is detrimental to their livelihood.

In addition, constituents will likely have to travel out of district twice, once for the interview and then for the oath ceremony. As such, the new policy will impose double the burden.

We urge you to schedule customers that qualify for fee waivers and those with disabilities at the field office closest to them to ensure that the policy does not create new problems, in particular for those who may struggle to travel long distances to other USCIS offices. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Pramila Jayapal  
United States Representative



Adam Smith  
United States Representative



Patty Murray  
United States Senator



Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator



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

August 5, 2019

The Honorable Pramila Jayapal  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Jayapal:

Thank you for your July 3, 2019 letter regarding U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' (USCIS) recently announced national strategy of shifting caseloads between field offices to reduce processing times and decrease disparities in processing times across the country.

Since the end of 2015, USCIS has experienced an increase in processing times for Form N-400, Application for Naturalization. This is mainly due to higher than projected volumes during fiscal Year (FY) 2016 and FY 2017 (FY 2017 up 15 percent from FY 2016, and FY 2016 up 25.5 percent from FY 2015). Field offices across the country were not equally impacted by the increased filing volumes, nor were they equally able to mitigate the surge in filings.

USCIS considered numerous options to reduce Form N-400 processing times in the Seattle Field Office, as well as the impact of those options on the applicant population. After balancing many considerations, we determined that the shift of cases from south of Seattle to Portland, and east of Seattle to Yakima, was the best option to implement the national strategy. I would also like to note the following points:

- District 20 offers same day ceremonies. Applicants who appear for a naturalization interview and are approved may have the opportunity of a same day oath ceremony when possible. The practice of same day naturalization ceremonies will continue, when feasible, for applicants who travel to either Yakima or Portland for their naturalization interviews. This decreases the impact of the case shifts.
- The N-400 approval rate for the Seattle, Portland, and Yakima Field Offices is currently over 90 percent. Approximately 75 percent of applicants will be approved at their initial interview and be able to naturalize the same day when feasible.
- Applicants whose cases are moved to the Portland Field Office and the Yakima Field Office will have their interviews scheduled approximately 11-12 months sooner than if they were interviewed at the Seattle Field Office.



- All USCIS facilities are Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant. Across the country, all of our facilities are ADA compliant and any applicant for naturalization can contact our disability accommodation program and request an accommodation (<https://egov.uscis.gov/e-Request/Intro.do>).
- Average travel time between the Seattle Field Office and either the Yakima Field Office or the Portland Field Office is 2.5 to 3 hours. In many districts across the country, applicants for naturalization travel in excess of these times. Within District 20, it currently takes applicants from Central/Eastern Oregon and Central/Eastern Washington in excess of 3 hours to reach their respective field offices. There are public transportation options between Seattle and Portland/Yakima.
- As we shift caseloads between field offices to reduce processing times and decrease geographic disparities, caseload changes will not affect where applicants attend their biometrics appointments. We will still direct them to the nearest Application Support Center.

Applicants should follow the instructions on the USCIS interview appointment notice. If an applicant has unique circumstances where they cannot attend the interview at the office listed on the notice, the applicant can call the USCIS Contact Center for live assistance in rescheduling an appointment.

As always, we will continue to strive to adjudicate all applications, petitions, and requests as effectively and efficiently as possible in accordance with all applicable laws, policies, and regulations.

Thank you again for your letter and interest in this important issue. The co-signers 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 and Intergovernmental Affairs at (202) 272-1940.

Respectfully,



Ken Cuccinelli II  
Acting Director