May 23, 2019

The Honorable L. Francis Cissna
Director
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
20 Massachusetts Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20529

Dear Director Cissna:

We write to express our concerns regarding current processing delays for immigration benefits at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). In Nevada, one in five residents is an immigrant. As workers, taxpayers, and business owners, immigrants are an invaluable part of Nevada’s diverse and thriving communities. These delays affect the social and economic welfare of all of our residents.

Current wait times have reached an unacceptable length. The average processing time for green card applications (I-485 petitions) in the Las Vegas and Reno field offices is between 11 to 27 months, up to twice as long as the average national wait time.\(^1\) Additionally, the Reno and Las Vegas field offices can see processing times of 10 to 20 months for applications for naturalization (N-400), also up to double the national average wait time.\(^2\)

Processing delays have significant consequences for individuals, families, and businesses. The social and economic costs of inconsistent and undependable immigration processes are far too high, and those who are trying their best to work within the parameters of our immigration system should not be met with undue stress and burden.

In light of the USCIS delays in the Reno and Las Vegas field offices and the impact they have on all Nevadans, we request answers to the following questions:

1. What are the most frequently submitted applications by Nevadans and what are the current corresponding wait times for each of these applications?

   a. Please describe the factors that have led the Reno and Las Vegas field offices to experience delays in processing times that are twice the national average.

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2. What steps are being taken to address delays at both USCIS Service Centers and USCIS Field Offices?

3. In regard to expanding the Information Services Modernization Program, what steps is USCIS taking to ensure that these online services are accessible to as many communities as possible, including individuals facing language barriers and those without reliable internet access?
   
   a. If USCIS determines that a constituent will need in-person assistance, how many attempts does an officer make to contact the individual?

4. Do you plan to hire additional staff at the Reno or Las Vegas field offices to address the backlog?
   
   a. If there are any specific barriers that have resulted in delays in the hiring process, please provide your plan to address those barriers.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. It is a priority for us that these issues are addressed and we look forward to receiving your response.

Sincerely,

Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator

Jacky Rosen
United States Senator
June 25, 2019

The Honorable Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Cortez Masto:

Thank you for your letter of May 23, 2019, regarding processing delays at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Please find enclosed responses to your questions.

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

Respectfully,

Ken Cuccinelli II
Acting Director

Enclosure
1. What are the most frequently submitted applications by Nevadans and what are the current corresponding wait times for each of these applications?

The two form types most frequently received in Nevada are Form N-400, Application for Naturalization, and Form I-485, Application to Register Permanent Residence or Adjust Status (based on a family relationship). The current median processing times in the Las Vegas Field Office for Form N-400 is 15 months, while the median processing time for family-sponsored Form I-485 is 13.5 months. For the Reno Field Office, the current median processing times are 10.5 months for Form N-400, and 14.5 months for family-sponsored Form I-485. Please see the attached report for additional information concerning other frequent form types received at these two offices.

a. Please describe the factors that have led the Reno and Las Vegas Field Offices to experience delays in processing times that are twice the national average.

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2018, both the Reno and Las Vegas offices' attrition rates were much higher than anticipated. Reno had an attrition rate of 35 percent, and Las Vegas had an attrition rate of 26 percent.

The Reno Field Office is authorized seven permanent immigration services officers (ISOs). Since the office is small, the 35 percent attrition rate in FY 2018 led to a significant increase in processing times.

The Las Vegas Field Office is authorized 29 permanent ISOs. The 26 percent attrition rate in FY 2018 led to a significant increase in processing times. In addition, in FY 2019, the three over hire ISO positions were recently converted to permanent positions to ensure that the Las Vegas Field Office has the adequate staffing to process cases in a timely manner.

Keeping in mind that attrition continues to be a challenge for the Nevada offices, we have begun to use multiple non-competitive hiring authorities to supplement the competitive hiring process for ISOs. This practice ensures that our ISOs have a diversity of background and experience and allows us the ability to fill vacancies in a more timely manner, should the need arise.

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1 Please note that the processing times featured on https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/ reflects the range of time that it takes to complete the cases that fall between the 50th and 93rd percentile. The first number is the median, meaning half of all cases are adjudicated by this point, the second number is the upper end of range, reflecting the amount of time it takes to complete 93 percent of cases.

2 Seven, if including the Application Support Center Immigration Services Officer.

3 Thirty, if including the Application Support Center Immigration Services Officer.
2. **What steps are being taken to address delays at both USCIS Service Centers and USCIS Field Offices?**

In FY 2019, USCIS authorized an additional 737 employees (a 5 percent increase) in the operational directorates that conduct adjudications. This follows an increase of 908 authorized positions in FY 2018 (a 7 percent increase). Of these, 250 additional positions were for Service Center Operations in FY 2018 and 366 in FY 2019. With the proposed rulemaking to adjust the Immigration Examinations Fee Account fee schedule in FY 2020, USCIS plans to increase its staff to reduce its backlog and keep up with the projected workloads.

Additionally, USCIS has opened three new field offices in the past 3 years and expanded 10 others in an effort to increase processing capacity of naturalization applications and other immigration benefits.

USCIS is also working to eliminate the backlog by focusing on efficiency. Moving forward, USCIS will transition more pre-, post-, and non-adjudicative work to non-adjudicators, allowing adjudicators to focus solely on functions requiring their expertise. USCIS will centralize the delivery of information services through the USCIS Contact Center to allow applicants to receive case status updates more quickly, without having to visit a USCIS office. Furthermore, USCIS will update processing time goals to reflect operational realities.

Among other steps to reduce delays, USCIS is moving our casework into an electronic environment. The digital environment will facilitate systems integration to allow better updating of systems as well as quicker notification to applicants and petitioners. USCIS anticipates that system improvements will reduce time delays involved in mailing, transferring files, and waiting for related records.

USCIS also reintroduced performance metrics in FY 2018 for some components to ensure timelier processing. Specifically, the Field Operations Directorate identified office level targets for major form types and Service Center Operations added metrics for ISOs. Preliminary data have shown some minimal increases in case completions per hour or a leveling-off of declines, depending on the form type. For example, Field Operations Directorate’s case completions per hour for Form I-130, Petition for Alien Relative, improved by 15 percent for beneficiaries who are immediate relatives of U.S. citizens. Likewise, the processing times for Form I-485 in the family-sponsored categories improved by 2 percent. Service Center Operations’ case completions per hour also improved in Form I-918, Petition for U Nonimmigrant Status, and Supplement A by 7 percent, and Form I-485 (refugee) by 8 percent. USCIS will continue to monitor these rates and assess improvements for other form types in the future.

USCIS is committed to address delayed processing times and find new ways to process cases as efficiently as possible while ensuring that applicants or petitioners have met their burden of proof to establish eligibility for the benefit sought to the satisfaction of our officers.
3. In regard to expanding the Information Services Modernization Program, what steps is USCIS taking to ensure that these online services are accessible to as many communities as possible, including individuals facing language barriers and those without reliable internet access?

USCIS maintains websites in English and Spanish and provides many materials in more than 20 languages through the Multilingual Resource Center (https://www.uscis.gov/tools/multilingual-resource-center). The websites are specifically designed to work well on cell phones for people without Internet access through a computer.

If people are unable to use the online self-service tools, they can call the USCIS Contact Center for assistance with services.

a. If USCIS determines that a constituent will need in-person assistance, how many attempts does an officer make to contact the individual?

The USCIS Contact Center conducts two attempts to reach a person by phone, usually within a one- to two-hour window. If we are not able to reach the person, the USCIS Contact Center will leave a voicemail indicating that we attempted to reach them. If the person does not answer on the second attempt, we will send an email asking them to contact us again.

4. Do you plan to hire additional staff at the Reno or Las Vegas field offices to address the backlog?

USCIS has taken a variety of steps in our Nevada offices to improve processing times on adjustment of status and naturalization applications.

All ISO positions in the Reno Field Office are currently staffed (including the over hire position). With their full staff, the Reno median cycle times are projected to be at or below 5 months for both naturalization and adjustment of status applications by the end of 2019.

In the Las Vegas Field Office, we are on track to being fully staffed by the end of the year. Recently, we have taken steps to increase production on a per-officer level. Specifically, we have revised the current interview scheduling practices to ensure that we were able to address the lengthy wait times. Starting in July, we are expanding the hours that we conduct interviews from the current schedule of 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. to the revised schedule of 6:15 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Furthermore, we have worked with the U.S. District Court in the District of Nevada to double the number of candidates for naturalization that the U.S. District Court in Las Vegas can naturalize per month. With these changes, Las Vegas median cycle times are projected to be at or below 10 months for both naturalization and adjustment of status applications by the end of 2019.
a. If there are any specific barriers that have resulted in delays in the hiring process, please provide your plan to address those barriers.

As discussed above, we have begun to use multiple non-competitive hiring authorities to supplement the formal, competitive hiring process that the Nevada Field Offices have traditionally used to fill vacant ISO positions. Using these additional methods for hiring ensures that we can more nimbly work to fill vacancies, should we lose an employee to attrition. Specifically, we will be using the Schedule A, Veterans Recruitment Appointment, and Returned Peace Corps Volunteer non-competitive eligibilities to ensure that we mitigate potentials delays in the hiring process.
The table below shows Receipts and Processing Time data for the Top 5 requested forms at the Reno and Las Vegas Field offices for Fiscal Years 2018-2019 (through April).

### US Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS)
**Receipts and Processing Times for Reno and Las Vegas Field Offices**
**Top 5 Forms Received**
**Fiscal Year 2018-2019 (through April)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Reno Receipts</th>
<th>Reno Processing Time (50th Percentile in months)</th>
<th>Reno Processing Time (93rd Percentile in months)</th>
<th>Las Vegas Receipts</th>
<th>Las Vegas Processing Time (50th Percentile in months)</th>
<th>Las Vegas Processing Time (93rd Percentile in months)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N-400 Naturalization</td>
<td>1,980</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>11,896</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-485 Family</td>
<td>980</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>5,560</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-130 Immediate Relative</td>
<td>671</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>4,026</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N-600 Cert. Of Citizenship</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>1,617</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-485 Employment</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please note:
1) This report reflects the most up-to-date data available at the time the database is queried.
2) Duplicate cases have been removed.
3) N-400 includes paper-filed and EUS filed applications, but does not include military naturalizations.
4) Receipts for Reno and Las Vegas may include applicants from nearby states of California and Arizona.
5) N-400 does not include military.
7) Additional information on processing times can be found here: https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/more-info.

Data Pulled: June 4, 2019
Report Created: June 4, 2019
Source: PASEXEC database for Receipts; IMAPS for Cycle Time; https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/ for processing times
Office of Performance and Quality (OPQ), Performance Analysis and External Reporting (PAER), Ji