

June 10, 2003

Fact Sheet: First 100 Days of The BCIS 6/10/03

On March 1, services formerly provided by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) transitioned into the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) under the Bureau of Citizenship & Immigration Services (BCIS). In support of the DHS overall mission, the immediate priorities of the new BCIS are to implement solutions for improving immigration customer services, continue to eliminate immigration adjudications backlogs and promote national security. The BCIS will continue efforts to fundamentally transform and improve the delivery of immigration and citizenship services.

This new Bureau includes approximately 15,000 employees and contractors, and is headed by the Director of BCIS, Eduardo Aguirre Jr., who reports directly to the Deputy Secretary for Homeland Security.

Through a network of 250 local offices, Application Support Centers, Service Centers, Asylum offices, National Customer Service Call (NCSC) Centers, Forms Centers, and the Internet, BCIS is responsible for processing:

- *Family-based petitions* - facilitating the process for close relatives to immigrate, gain permanent residency, work, etc.;
- *Employment-based petitions* - facilitating the process for current and prospective employees to immigrate or stay in the U.S. temporarily;
- *Asylum and Refugee processing* - adjudicating asylum and the processing of refugees;
- *Naturalization* - processing applications of those who wish to become U.S. citizens;
- *Special status programs* - adjudicating eligibility for U.S. immigration status as a form of humanitarian aid to foreign nationals; and,
- *Document issuance and renewal* - including verification of eligibility, production and issuance of immigration documents.

Long-term strategies for improving immigration and citizenship service delivery will enhance BCIS's ability to annually:

- Process over 7 million applications;
- Serve over 13 million customers via the National Customer Service Call Centers;
- Serve over 6 million customers through information counters at local offices;
- Serve over 6 million customers by phone through contacts at the Service Centers;
- Complete approximately 75,000 asylum cases; and
- Conduct the naturalization of approximately one million new citizens.

During its first 100 days of operations (March 1st-June 8th), the Bureau made significant strides toward its fundamental goals of improving immigration services while maintaining the integrity of the system. The following is a synopsis of its most salient accomplishments:

Core values: Integrity, respect and ingenuity were established as the core values of the Bureau. These important values were shared with all 15,000 employees and are prominently displayed in all field and regional offices

Re-branding: BCIS initiated a re-branding effort to insure that customers were made aware of changes in the organization and that they understood that their applications, interviews and naturalization ceremonies would continue unabated.

Strategic planning: The Bureau launched an initiative designed to review business plans and processes. This effort resulted in the chartering of working groups responsible for streamlining the following service areas: Employment and family based processes, implementing improvements in the capturing of biometrics and document production, streamlining the issuance of certificates of citizenship for adopted children, reducing lines at local offices and identifying self-imposed requirements that inhibit processing.

Backlog Reduction Team: A Backlog Reduction Team is currently in the process of formulating a proposed plan designed to provide HQ, regional and field guidance on this important initiative. The plan will look at maximizing resources while further streamlining our processes.

Electronic filing: For the first time in history, immigrants are now able to file two key immigration applications, using the Internet, without compromising the security and integrity of the process. The application for replacement/renewal of the “green card” (Form I-90) and the Application for Employment Authorization (Form I-765), are the first two forms currently available for online filing. Phase two of this important initiative will include adding additional forms as well as the ability for credit card payment of all fees. By 2005, 90% of all immigrations forms will be available for online filing. Also, over 30,000 customers are taking advantage of “Case Status on Line” daily. This web-based service allows customers to check on status of petitions filed at BCIS Service Centers nationwide. We recently expanded the functionality of this service by offering case status online to customers calling our 1-800 number.

Temporary Protected Status: In close consultation with the Office of the Secretary, the Bureau effectively launched TPS re-registration efforts for the approximately 100,000 nationals of Honduras and Nicaragua potentially eligible under this important initiative. Bureau leadership continues to work closely with Embassy officials in order to coordinate public information and outreach efforts across the country.

Executive Order on Expedited Naturalization for Military Personnel and Posthumous U.S. Citizenship: The Bureau has processed approximately 7,000 requests for expedited citizenship for military applicants (from July 2002 to the present). In

addition to the adjudication of the petitions, field offices are also hosting special ceremonies for members of the Armed Forces. To date, we have processed approximately nine requests for posthumous citizenship on behalf of members of the armed forces. Senior BCIS leadership presents certificates of posthumous citizenship to families during special naturalization ceremonies and in close coordination with military officials.

Pilot for the Standardization of the Citizenship Test: The Bureau recently launched of a pilot project to standardize the English, government, and United States history test administered to citizenship applicants. The first phase of the two-stage pilot focuses on the English language. Five cities participated in this first phase of the naturalization pilot: Newark, Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Antonio and Atlanta.

Office of Citizenship: Efforts are currently underway to establish this important component of the Bureau. As mandated by the Homeland Security Act of 2002, the Office of Citizenship will be primarily responsible for developing and implementing far-reaching outreach and public education initiatives designed to highlight the relevance of United States citizenship. An interim Director has been named and additional personnel resources have been identified.

International Offices: In close coordination with the Department of State, clear chains of command were also established in our three district offices overseas: Rome, Mexico City and Bangkok. Identifying BCIS leadership for all overseas operations will further enhance the critical mission of our international components.

“Adjudicate Orphan First Program”: This recently implemented pilot program is design to eliminate the unfortunate situations in which individuals adopt children in foreign countries only to find out later that the children are not allowed to immigrate to the US because they are not orphans according to US laws. This pilot program will initially be available on a voluntary basis in five countries: Haiti, Honduras, Philippines, Poland and Sierra Leone. Additional countries may be added to the program in the future.

Cross border dialogue: The Director and senior BCIS leadership met with Mexican and Canadian officials in order to establish open lines of communication on areas of common interest. This dialogue resulted in the exchange of information and ideas for further process improvement.

Each year the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS) receives approximately seven million applications for immigration benefits. BCIS has now developed the technology to accept electronic filing of certain applications for immigration benefits. This technology improves both customer service and BCIS’s ability to verify the identity of individuals applying for these benefits thus applying another layer of security to our immigration system. E-filing, combined with the collection and storage of an applicant’s digital photograph, signature, and fingerprint, allow the BCIS to produce a high quality immigration document with special security features. Applications soon to be available for online filing are forms I-765 (Application for Employment Authorization) and I-90 (Application for Replacement of Green Card).

These two forms represent approximately 30% of the total number of benefit applications filed with BCIS annually. BCIS plans to expand the E-filing initiative to cover all BCIS forms over the next few years.

E-filing Applications

1. E-filing is quick, easy and convenient for applicants because it allows them, or their representatives, to complete and submit applications at any time, from any computer with Internet access. Upon completion of the e-filing session, customers will receive instant electronic confirmation that the application was received. Customers can then schedule an appointment to visit an Application Support Center for collection of a digital photograph, signature, and fingerprint.
2. For those who file electronically, BCIS confirms the identity of the customer early in the application process. BCIS also electronically collects a photograph, signature, and fingerprint for the individual. These biometrics are stored and can be used later for verification of the person's identity.
3. Customers, whose applications are approved, receive high quality immigration documents with special security features produced from BCIS' centralized card production facility.
4. BCIS intends to add electronic filing capabilities for additional forms in the Fall of 2003. Additional forms include: Form I-129, Petition for Nonimmigrant Worker; Form I-131, Application for Travel Document; Form I-140, Immigrant Petition for Alien Worker; Form I-539, Application to Extend/Change Nonimmigrant Status; Form I-821, Application for Temporary Protected Status; and Form I-907, Request for Premium Processing.
5. Filing instructions and eligibility information for e-filing are available at www.bcis.gov.

Online Status Check

6. Last year, the BCIS expanded its e-services by introducing "Case Status Online". Customers who have a receipt number for an e-filed application or an application or petition filed at a Service Center can check the status of their pending case online through the website www.bcis.gov and avoid prolonged waits on the phone or at a local office.
7. It is estimated that more than 30,000 customers take advantage of this service every day. Those filing electronically will also be able to take advantage of this remarkable service.

Forms Online

8. The website also provides information and forms online for users to download free of charge. Customers are able to print out the forms, complete them and mail them to the appropriate office for adjudication.
9. Today, the online form catalog is the most used feature of the BCIS Website, with almost 1 million of the nearly 2.8 million visitors per month downloading forms.