

**Congresswoman Norma J. Torres (CA-35)**  
**Testimony to the House Judiciary Committee Member's Day Hearing**  
**October 22, 2021**

Chairman Nadler and Chairwoman Lofgren, thank you for hearing from members, especially during this critical juncture for immigration reform. Our nation was founded by immigrants and immigrants continue to be the backbone of our country- the pandemic made their critical role abundantly clear. As an immigrant myself and the Chair of the New Americans Caucus, I care deeply about equitable access to citizenship. It is time to stop vilifying and scapegoating our friends and neighbors. Instead, we must remain focused on making our immigration system more safe, humane, and fair for those who seek to make the U.S. home. You have my unwavering commitment to do so.

I particularly wanted to highlight a few of my immigration priorities:

- Citizenship cannot only be for those who can afford it. Unfortunately, the fees can often be a bottleneck in the long, complicated process for citizenship. My bill with Congresswoman Meng, the “Reduce Financial Barriers to Immigration and Citizenship Act of 2021” (H.R. 5319) would waive fees for naturalization for eligible immigrants and codify fee waivers, removing this financial barrier to earned citizenship. The last four years showed us the extent to which even Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs) remain vulnerable to deportation and unconstitutional, xenophobic attempts to strip them of their earned path to citizenship. Any immigration reform will not cross the finish line without also ensuring that those who have legal status are also able to naturalize. I implore you to consider naturalization as a critical part of our equitable immigration reforms.
- During the pandemic, we saw naturalizations and other services grind to a halt. The *Heroes Act* allowed for remote citizenship oath ceremonies for eligible immigrants. Resuming naturalization services allowed thousands to become American citizens and the benefits that come with it, at a time when many were deeply impacted by the pandemic. My bill, the “Remote Naturalization Act” (H.R. 4858), looks to extend this policy beyond the pandemic, as often work, health, or other conditions outside of crises may prevent an immigrant from being able to attend an in-person naturalization ceremony. I hope our lessons from the pandemic allow us to continue to make citizenship more accessible.
- Through this year’s appropriations bill, I led 37 of our colleagues in championing a legal representation pilot program. I am proud that the bill included \$50 million for this pilot program for legal representation for children and families, a huge increase from last year’s proposed \$15 million. Immigrants deserve to have their cases heard and understand the complicated, confusing process. We also know immigrants are more likely to show up to court when they have representation. Legal representation helps determine those cases with merit from an early stage, saving judges and appeals attorneys from having to do additional work in an already backlogged system. Legal representation is not just what is fair and just, it is cost-effective and makes our system more effective. I look forward to working with you on avenues to expand and strengthen legal representation for immigrants.

Thank you again for all of your work on these challenging issues. I know our shared efforts will help meet the moment.

Sincerely,

Norma J. Torres  
Member of Congress