



CHIRLA
Coalition for Humane
Immigrant Rights

July 19, 2019

The Honorable Zoe Lofgren
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship
Committee of the Judiciary
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Ken Buck
Ranking Member
Immigration and Citizenship Subcommittee
Committee of the Judiciary
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

**RE: House Committee on the Judiciary’s Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship
Hearing on “Policy Changes and Processing Delays at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration
Services”**

Dear Chairwoman Lofgren, Ranking Member Buck, and members of the Immigration and Citizenship Subcommittee,

On behalf of the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA), I submit this letter to the House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship hearing on July 16, 2019: “Policy Changes and Processing Delays at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.” We commend the Subcommittee for shedding light on the agency and the problematic issues it faces when it comes to processing immigration applications.

Established in 1986, CHIRLA serves as the largest statewide immigrant rights organization in California with national impact. Our mission is to achieve a just society fully inclusive of immigrants. We organize and serve individuals, institutions, and coalitions to build power, transform public opinion, and change policies to fulfill full humane, civil, and labor rights for our immigrant communities and our nation. Through local and state work, we have pushed policies to advance the integration of immigrants into our state’s fabric. In the most recent years, we have also established a robust legal service department to provide immigration services for low-income Californians that are eligible for citizenship, or administrative relief,

including Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) applications and Citizenship. Our legal department works closely with USCIS, and since the change in administration, it is clear that negative changes have been implemented at USCIS to limit access for low income immigrants, and immigrants of color.

USCIS, a component of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), is an agency that was established to oversee the immigration to our country. USCIS is the only component within DHS that does not focus on enforcement, but rather its purpose is to serve solely as an administrative agency. Its prior mission statement served as a touchstone of the why and how the agency operated itself as it outlined its purpose. Through this agency, eligible applicants can gather immigration relief information and submit their applications for citizenship, family based visas, employment based visas, access humanitarian programs, and gain civic information to participate in our nation's civic duties.

Last year, USCIS took a drastic change when it decided to move away from its long standing mission statement, which previously acknowledged that the U.S. is in fact a "nation of immigrants," and removed references that promoted citizenship and customer services. Instead, then Director Franciss Cissna decided to reform the agency to fall in line with the anti-immigrant rhetoric that the Trump administration conveys, and warned Americans of the supposed inherent dangers that lies in immigration thereby causing fear of immigrants amongst Americans. The agency, almost entirely funded by fees paid by immigrants, was established to support immigrants as customers. Today, the agency is catering towards the needs of Americans, whom Cissna stated USCIS ultimately serve,¹ instead of those potential beneficiaries of administrative relief.

USCIS has also made drastic policy changes through memos and proposed regulations that add stress to an already overwhelmed and complex immigration system with the sole purpose of further limiting access to our legal immigration system. CHIRLA is extremely concerned with the following: the proposed changes to the fee waiver eligibility criteria; proposed changes to public charge regulation; denaturalization efforts through Operation Janus; backlogs and processing delays of immigration cases pending before USCIS; Notice to Appear Memo and Request for Evidence and Notice of Intent to Deny Memo; enforcement activities at USCIS interviews. The aforementioned changes interfere with low income immigrants availability to access the legal migration pathways, deters immigrants from accessing health care and housing assistance, and add on to the current backlog that exists within USCIS. Lastly, it should not be the norm that ICE and USCIS work with one another for the sole purpose of enforcement as USCIS is not an enforcement agency as that ICE and CBP are tasked with such a purpose.

CHIRLA commends the House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship for hosting a hearing on USCIS. We hope ongoing oversight

¹Article:https://www.huffpost.com/entry/immigration-uscis-mission-statement_n_5a8f4884e4b03b55731a411c

hearings are conducted to address the root cause of the current backlog that USCIS faces, as no family or individual should be waiting years to gain relief. Should you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact Isabel J. Sanchez, National Policy Advocate, at isanchez@chirla.org or at (202) 641-1525.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Salas', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Angelica Salas
Executive Director, CHIRLA