



CWS Statement to the U.S. House Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship, pertaining to its [hearing](#) entitled “Oversight of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services” July 29, 2020

As a 74-year old humanitarian organization representing 37 Protestant, Anglican, and Orthodox communions and 24 local refugee resettlement offices across 17 states, **Church World Service (CWS) urges Congress to hold U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) accountable for its funding crisis by placing guardrails on any USCIS emergency appropriations.** It is essential to ensure that USCIS operates in good faith and to condemn USCIS for its refusal to restore the DACA program as ordered by multiple courts. It is imperative that USCIS’s budget shortfall is not used to turn our backs on refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants.

CWS recognizes the importance of USCIS in administering humanitarian programs and urges Congress to consider USCIS’s request for assistance with critical guardrails to safeguard USCIS’s use of taxpayer dollars. As Congress considers using tax-payer funds to assist the fee-funded agency, we urge Congress to [follow conditions](#) that safeguard the continuous operation of the refugee program; ensure transparency in how appropriations are spent; increase revenues without overburdening vulnerable populations; eliminate wasteful and inefficient practices that have led to record delays; and investigate the policies that led USCIS to this funding crisis, such as the use of hundreds of millions of dollars for harmful immigration enforcement.

CWS is deeply concerned about USCIS’s fiscal mismanagement that has resulted in a [reported](#) shortfall of \$1.2 billion in Fiscal Year 2020. However, USCIS [announced](#) it would postpone the furlough of [thousands](#) of employees from August 3 to August 31, 2020, which only came after [Senators Leahy and Tester](#) made public the latest USCIS revenue estimates showing a surplus at the end of FY 2020, and not the previously projected deficit. Although USCIS is blaming its budget crunch on the COVID-19 pandemic, a projected deficit had been reported as early as November 2019. This is surprising considering that three years ago, USCIS had a surplus of \$800 million.

CWS urges Congress to expeditiously fund USCIS operations so that it can operate the refugee and asylum programs in good faith and work toward rebuilding the resettlement program. Due to the current global pandemic, tens and thousands of refugees whose cases have been adjudicated by USCIS and are ready for travel in FY 2020 may not be able to travel. In addition, the administration has, for the first time, restricted the ability of federal agencies to re-allocate refugee arrivals between the various categories. In order to maximize the best use of USCIS resources, refugees marked ready for departure this fiscal year should be counted toward the FY 2020 admissions goal - and be admitted regardless of their allocation category. Further, Congress should ensure that USCIS establishes mandatory timelines for processing refugees and Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) applicants, given the unprecedented delays in USCIS processing over the last three years. Congress should also ensure that the administration extends validity periods for security checks for refugees and SIVs, as they are already the most vetted travelers to the United States and the length of their resource-intensive security checks have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Since refugees are required by U.S. law to adjust their status one year after arriving to the United States, given USCIS’s delays in green card processing, we also urge Congress to waive in-person interviews for refugees seeking to adjust and to re-use recently collected biometric information - and to extend refugees’ EADs for at least a 2-year period.

As immigrant families face increased delays due to lengthening visa backlogs, CWS requests that Congress ensure USCIS [mitigate family visa inefficiencies](#). Our current family-based immigration system and diversity immigrant visa program have successfully contributed to the rich, vibrant, and multicultural U.S. communities that we see today. We urge Congress to preserve the diversity and family-based visas that are not used this year and allow them to be used in subsequent fiscal years.

CWS strongly denounces USCIS’s refusal to fully restore the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program as ordered by multiple courts. In June 2020, the Supreme Court ruled against the administration’s attempt to end the DACA program. Since then, the administration has not only neglected to issue any guidance directing USCIS to accept and process new DACA applications, but has [actively refused](#) to accept new DACA applications. Both the administration and USCIS are acting in defiance of the Supreme Court’s ruling. We urge Congress to hold USCIS accountable to processing applications for current DACA recipients, more than [300,000 new applicants](#), and 55,500 newly-eligible individuals.