



July 29, 2020

Chair Lofgren
Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship
Washington, DC 20515-6216

Ranking Member Ken Buck
Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship
Washington, DC 20515-6216

Re: Full Committee Hearing “Oversight of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services”

Dear Chair Lofgren & Ranking Member Buck:

On behalf of the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA), the largest statewide immigrant rights organization in California, I submit this statement for the record for today’s crucial hearing entitled “Oversight of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.” Rarely has oversight been so necessary.

In addition to organizing the immigrant communities of California and advocating for policy changes at the regional, state and federal levels, CHIRLA has a strong, dedicated legal services team that helps process numerous types of immigration benefit application every single day. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced us to adjust our operations on numerous occasions, but we have continued to serve the community to the best of our abilities throughout this time.

We wish that we could say the same for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

Instead, the Administration in general and the leadership at USCIS in particular has dedicated the bulk of its time to crafting policies that trip up its most dedicated civil servants while enabling those who would sink USCIS from within. To be clear, we are talking about the applications that *even reach* the agency since these policies and the general anti-immigrant tenor of the Administration are both preventing and dissuading community members from pursuing the benefits for which they are eligible in the first place.

The purported financial distress that USCIS is experiencing is clearly one manufactured by the Administration eager to use the pandemic as a pretext. Worse, as shown by recent revelations pursuant to queries from Senators Leahy and Tester, the forecast budget shortfall was seemingly exaggerated by forces within USCIS or the White House. Following what turned out to be a miscalculation, USCIS announced plans to furlough large parts of its workforce, plans it has now revised. The chilling effect of these mixed messages on both the immigrant community and USCIS personnel who serve them is immeasurable. We have no doubt that this is the very intent behind this concerted effort.

Among the policies put in place to dissuade, distract, distort and ultimately destroy the normal functions of USCIS, include:

- An absurd fee rule that encompasses both astronomical fee increases and a simultaneous elimination of fee waivers;
- A public charge rule that sows fear confusion among those it directly impacts as well as those who would not be;
- A new approach to the exercise of discretion, meaning denial, for immigration benefits;
- Revisions to numerous forms for no discernible purpose;
- Extreme vetting of applications, especially N-400 naturalizations, that would normally have been processed and granted; AND



- Just yesterday, a new USCIS memo on Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) that upends the program as we know it in complete defiance of the Supreme Court's recent ruling.

Accordingly, we request continued continuous, unrelenting oversight and that any appropriations for this agency come with strict guardrails that will prevent USCIS from engaging in these and additional harmful pursuits to advance the Administration's unlawful attempts to cut off as much immigration as possible while effectively disenfranchising citizens-in-waiting during an election year. Please contact me at cbergquist@chirla.org should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Carl Bergquist
Policy Counsel
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)