

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

January 26, 2021

Tracy Renaud
Acting Director
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
20 Massachusetts Ave NW,
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Acting Director Renaud:

I write to request the reopening of the Application Service Center on Saipan and that the services previously offered, particularly the naturalization interviews for lawful permanent residents in the Marianas, resume as quickly as possible.

The Saipan Service Center was closed on March 19, 2020, when USCIS announced the temporary suspension of in-person services at all USCIS field offices, asylum offices, and ASCs to help slow the spread of COVID-19. Subsequently on June 4, some USCIS field offices and asylum offices resumed non-emergency, in-person services. The Saipan ASC did not, however, except for limited biometric services provided by a contractor beginning in September.

This discrepancy and continued closure of the Saipan ASC is difficult to understand, because the threat of disease in the Marianas is minimal. Eighty-two COVID-19 cases since August were incoming airline passengers either identified through health screening at the airport and isolated or who tested positive on the fifth day of mandatory quarantine for inbound passengers. Only one case of community spread has been reported in that time. Consequently, as of September, the offices of the Marianas government, the congressional district offices, and the federal courts have resumed normal hours (while requiring mask wearing and social distancing protocols). Yet USCIS remains closed.

This continuing USCIS closure on Saipan is in contrast to Guam, where it appears that naturalization interviews are being conducted, because there have been nine naturalization ceremonies since July of last year. Yet Guam reports a total of 7,554 COVID-19 cases, of which, 71 were confirmed within the last seven days.

Meanwhile, the USCIS closure on Saipan is a serious hardship for my constituents. They come to their congressional office for assistance and answers to questions about naturalization, CNMI Long Term Resident status applications, pending Lawful Permanent Resident petitions, and the US Workforce Act (P.L. 115-218) regulations—questions we work to answer, but which would be more appropriately handled by ASC staff. And for those waiting for naturalization interviews as their final step toward citizenship we can provide no help at all.

Again, I request the reopening of the Saipan ASC—or, at least, some explanation from you of why continued closure is warranted by the coronavirus. I further request, even if the USCIS office on Saipan cannot be fully reopened, that some accommodation be made for part-time reopening to provide critical services to persons seeking naturalization.

Tracy Renaud
January 26, 2021
Page 2

Should your staff have any questions about this request, please contact Frances Diaz, Senior Legislative Assistant, at frances.diaz@mail.house.gov or 202-507-0267.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of stylized, flowing letters that appear to read 'G. K. C. Sablan'.

GREGORIO KILILI CAMACHO SABLAN
Member of Congress



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

February 12, 2021

The Honorable Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Sablan:

Thank you for your January 26, 2021 letter.

The Department of Homeland Security has no greater responsibility than ensuring the safety and security of our country. Responding to the coronavirus pandemic has required that everyone work within changing, complex circumstances. Our primary goal is to ensure the safety of the public and our employees as the situation evolves.

We recognize that there are immigration-related challenges that families, employers and others face as a direct result of the national emergency. We continue to carefully analyze these issues and leverage our resources to effectively address these challenges. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration (USCIS) temporarily closed offices to the public for several months last year but has been resuming in-person services in accordance with the Center for Disease Control guidelines to mitigate the risk and ensure the safety of our employees and communities.

We appreciate your suggestions regarding our services in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. The ASC in Saipan is assigned one permanent Immigration Services Officer (ISO) position, but that position is currently vacant. Unfortunately, the rotation of a new ISO to fill the Saipan ASC position was put on hold as a result of both the travel restrictions during the pandemic and the financial shortfall. However, an employee has been selected to fill that vacancy, and we are making arrangements to onboard the employee in the summer of 2021. At that time, we anticipate that USCIS will begin to resume conducting interviews (including for naturalization and permanent residence applicants) and providing other in-person services. It is not feasible to send an employee to the Saipan ASC on a part-time basis at this time due to travel restrictions and quarantining requirements.

The Honorable Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan
Page 2

Please be assured of the importance and dedication that USCIS places on our mission in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and we look forward to resuming operations. Should you require any additional assistance, please have your staff contact the USCIS Office of Legislative Affairs at (240) 721-3801.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tracy L. Renaud". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tracy" and last name "Renaud" clearly distinguishable.

Tracy L. Renaud
Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Director