

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 28, 2020

The Honorable Chad Wolf
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

The Honorable Ken Cuccinelli
Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Deputy Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf and Senior Official Cuccinelli,

Thank you for your leadership at the Department of Homeland Security, your efforts to prevent the further spread of the coronavirus, and your efforts to protect the American people.

We understand that a recent agreement will implement a descope and early termination of a staffing contract with the National Benefits Center (Center), a part of the Field Operations Directorate at United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Further, it has been brought to our attention that USCIS agreed to a 30-day extension of the agreement's effective date.

We write to respectfully request that you consider an additional 60-day extension of the agreement's effective date. The present extension is appropriate, but a 60-day extension necessarily accounts for further decision space for all stakeholders regarding the impact the decision will have on the Kansas City region.

Federal and contract workers at the Center have made an invaluable contribution to the region's economy and to the federal government. Because of these workers, the region enjoys a more diverse business community, and the federal government enjoys the benefit of what the Center's leadership has called a "Midwest work ethic" and "great luck finding great employees."¹ The Center has been a fixture in the Kansas City region since its founding in 2001 in Lee's Summit, Missouri. The greater Kansas City region proudly recognizes its economic advantage as home to the Center and thousands of federal government employees.

The coronavirus pandemic has forced all industries to make difficult decisions in light of the unmatched stress on our economy. The federal government is no exception, and we understand that the fee-based structure of USCIS is uniquely challenged in this current environment.

However, as with any staffing decision, the decision at the National Benefits Center must fully take into account the needs of the hardworking men and women who have faithfully carried out their duties at the Center. Workers need time to figure out where their next paycheck is coming from and how they will cover the health and welfare benefits provided as a function of their employment at the Center.

¹ Alyssa Lally, Federal Agency Adding Space in Lee's Summit, Lee's Summit Economic Development Council (Jul. 19, 2019), <https://www.leessummit.org/federal-agency-adding-space-in-lees-summit/>.

For those workers who have faithfully served the federal government and the Kansas City region, we stand ready to work with you to ensure that workers are treated with the dignity owed to them.

Sincere regards,



Roy Blunt
United States Senator



Pat Roberts
United States Senator



Josh Hawley
United States Senator



Jerry Moran
United States Senator



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

June 17, 2020

The Honorable Roy Blunt
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Blunt:

Thank you for your May 28, 2020 letter. The Acting Secretary has asked that I respond on his behalf.

On May 26, 2020, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) determined that it would be able to continue to fund the National Benefits Center (NBC) Records Operations Contract at full performance levels through June 29, 2020. This would allow the NBC to sustain operational capabilities and facilitate work to our field offices as those offices prepare to resume in-person services. As a result, an option was exercised to extend the NBC contract to June 29, 2020. There should not be any impact to the NBC contract until that time.

As you are aware, USCIS is facing severe financial difficulties because of a reduction in application and petition fees during the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, USCIS is unable to commit that further funding will be available to continue full performance of the NBC contract beyond June 29, 2020.

Thank you again for your letter and interest in this important issue. The cosigners of your letter will receive a separate, identical response. Should you require any additional assistance, please have your staff contact the USCIS Office of Legislative Affairs at (202) 272-1940.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ja E", followed by a horizontal line.

Joseph Edlow
Deputy Director for Policy