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COMMITTEE ON RULES  
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Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

January 24, 2020

Dear Acting Deputy Secretary Cuccinelli,

I am writing to share concerns that were recently brought to my attention regarding how USCIS accommodates deaf and hard of hearing persons at its public events, especially naturalization ceremonies.

My office was recently made aware of an unfortunate episode in which one of my constituents was unable to fully participate in her husband's naturalization ceremony because no one took responsibility for ensuring that an interpreter was available. This is troubling enough, but the series of mishaps and miscommunications that led to this episode suggests a need to change how USCIS handles these situations.

In particular, my constituent was initially told that she would need to wait 30 days for a response to her request, even though they had only been given 7 days notice of the ceremony. Then, after not receiving the promised return call within the agreed upon two days, she was told she could not submit the request because she was not the applicant— even though friends and family regularly attend naturalization ceremonies. Eventually, her husband called USCIS's 800 number and was told that interpreters would be present at the ceremony. It should be noted that in each instance, my constituents were on hold for over half-an-hour and consistently encountered personnel who were unfamiliar with how to process a request for an interpreter.

Unfortunately, when my constituents arrived at the ceremony no interpreters were available and no one had any familiarity with one being requested and the only explanation given was a show of finger pointing between USCIS and the event host. As a result, my constituent was unable to fully experience a moment that she and her husband had been working towards for seven years.

This episode raises a series of questions about how USCIS handles these situations and, in light of the substantial deaf and hard of hearing population that I represent, this matter is of special concern for me. As such, I am requesting that your office provide the following information:

- What is the current protocol for providing sign language interpreters at USCIS events?
- How are requests for sign language interpretation received and processed?
- Why does USCIS require 30 days to process such requests?
- Why doesn't USCIS provide sign language interpreters at events as a matter of course?

Given that naturalization ceremonies represent the start of our fellow citizens' lives as new Americans, I am sure you will agree that they should reflect the notions of inclusivity and diversity that are the basis of our nation's greatness. I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joseph D. Morelle". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Joseph D. Morelle  
Member of Congress



**U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services**

March 20, 2020

The Honorable Joseph D. Morelle  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Morelle:

Thank you for your January 24, 2020 letter regarding how U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) accommodates deaf and hard of hearing persons at its public events, especially naturalization ceremonies. USCIS is committed to providing individuals with disabilities access to its programs, activities, and facilities. Our effort to provide a sign language interpreter for your constituent for her husband's naturalization ceremony last September clearly and regrettably fell short. An internal review found procedural errors which we have shared with the Department of Homeland Security's Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties for its investigation.

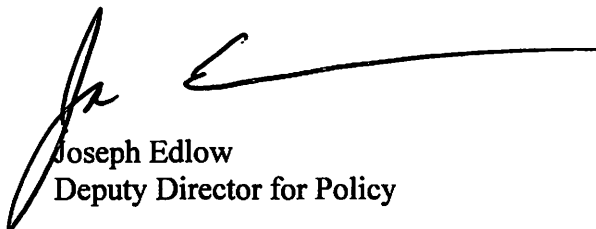
USCIS will provide sign language interpreters at events upon request. Providing them as a matter of course would require additional resources that have not been budgeted. However, in February 2019, USCIS updated its internal guidance to allow individuals who are not applicants but who are attending a USCIS program, activity, or appointment to request sign language interpreters. The updated guidance reflects that a field office should provide a sign language interpreter for any individual who is deaf or hard of hearing and seeks to participate in or attend an administrative oath ceremony, or a judicial ceremony when a court is unable to provide a sign language interpreter. We have taken steps to ensure all field offices are now aware of this updated guidance. Further, we are updating the job aid that provides guidance to our Contact Center representatives to ensure they have clearer direction.

USCIS does not require 30 days to process a request for a sign language interpreter. Normally, USCIS responds within 7 calendar days. If a request is received through the Contact Center less than 7 calendar days before an event, the request should be elevated to the local field office to respond as soon as possible. USCIS is also working to improve this process of making requests to field offices.

The Honorable Joseph D. Morelle  
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Thank you again for your letter. For any additional assistance, please have your staff contact the USCIS Office of Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs at (202) 272-1940.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. Edlow', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Joseph Edlow  
Deputy Director for Policy