

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 21, 2020

Acting Director Kenneth Cuccinelli
Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Director
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Washington, D.C. 20529

Dear Acting Director Cuccinelli:

As our country recovers from the public health effects of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), we are writing to respectfully request that U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) take all necessary measures to ensure eligible immigrants with approved naturalization applications have an opportunity to safely participate in U.S. Citizenship Oath of Allegiance Ceremonies, including remotely administering oaths of allegiance and expanding small in-person ceremonies, in accordance with preventive measures recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and local public health authorities.

As you are aware, on March 18, 2020, USCIS temporarily suspended in-person services to help slow the spread of COVID-19, leaving over 100,000 individuals without an opportunity to participate in naturalization ceremonies, a legal requirement for U.S. citizenship. Further, all eligible immigrants have completed all USCIS requirements, including passage of both a citizenship interview and citizenship exam, a thorough background check by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and meeting all residency requirements.

America's remarkable spirit is rooted in our diversity, history, and culture, which has always been enriched by our immigrant communities. We have had the privilege of meeting many eligible applicants and sharing their inspiring stories. Immigrants make extraordinary contributions to our economy and give back to their communities. Oath of Allegiance Ceremonies are a great step forward in their lives and also for our country.

Our immigrant communities have helped write the economic, social, and cultural story of America. Accordingly, we urge USCIS to ensure eligible applicants have an opportunity to participate in U.S. Citizenship Oath of Allegiance Ceremonies to become citizens and are able to continue to contribute to our great country.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



MARTIN HEINRICH
United States Senator



MARCO RUBIO
United States Senator



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

June 10, 2020

The Honorable Martin Heinrich
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Heinrich:

Thank you for your May 21, 2020 letter. Mr. Cuccinelli has asked that I respond on his behalf.

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) recognizes that there have been challenges for applicants and petitioners during the pandemic. Our primary goal has been to ensure the safety of the public and our employees. USCIS temporarily suspended routine in-person services, including most naturalization ceremonies, to help slow the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19). Our systems show that approximately 5,200 individuals naturalized from March 18 – May 25 and June 4, in approximately 144 ceremonies. We shifted to a largely telework environment and developed strategies to continue processing and adjudicating requests while also providing greater flexibilities to applicants and petitioners.

While there are numerous legal and logistical obstacles which prevent us from conducting naturalization ceremonies in a virtual environment, our offices have been working diligently to create new processes for conducting naturalization ceremonies that comply with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and local public health authority guidelines. In accordance with the national plan, we began a phased approach to reopening our offices for in-person services on June 4. This has included reviewing and assessing each office based upon local circumstances. A candidate whose naturalization ceremony was postponed due to the pandemic will receive a reschedule notice.

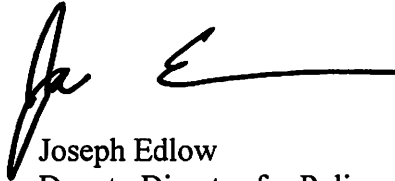
To limit exposure to COVID-19, we are incorporating social distancing and other mitigation efforts and modifying the number and size of naturalization ceremonies. Attendance at the ceremonies will be limited to the candidates who are scheduled to be naturalized, a parent or trusted adult if the candidate is a minor, and individuals providing disability assistance to a candidate. Our website provides additional information on entering USCIS facilities and the USCIS COVID-19 response at www.uscis.gov/about-us/uscis-response-covid-19.

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We appreciate and will consider the recommendations you and others have put forward. We will also continue to communicate publicly regarding any changes we make to ensure the public is fully informed of the steps we are taking to address the challenges resulting from this national health emergency.

Thank you for your interest in this issue. Should you require any additional assistance, please have your staff contact the USCIS Office of Legislative Affairs at (202) 272-1940.

Sincerely,



Joseph Edlow
Deputy Director for Policy

cc:

Marco Rubio
United States Senator