

Office of the Citizenship and Immigration
Services Ombudsman

**U.S. Department of Homeland
Security**

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**Homeland
Security**

Engagement Readout

The CIS Ombudsman's Webinar Series: Naturalization and Immigrant Integration

On June 23, 2021, the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) [Office of the Citizenship and Immigration Services Ombudsman \(CIS Ombudsman\)](#) hosted a public webinar to discuss naturalization and immigrant integration.

[CIS Ombudsman Phyllis A. Coven](#) was joined by [Felicia Escobar Carrillo](#), Chief of Staff for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), and [Katherine Culliton-González](#), DHS Officer for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL), to highlight the federal government's interagency strategy to promote naturalization and immigrant integration.

During the webinar, USCIS and CRCL provided an overview of their efforts to promote naturalization and implement Executive Order 14012, "Restoring Faith in Our Legal Immigration Systems and Strengthening Integration and Inclusion Efforts for New Americans" and some of their immigrant integration initiatives. Subject matter experts outlined several recent USCIS policy and process changes aimed at ensuring accessibility and minimizing barriers to the naturalization application process. USCIS also highlighted the naturalization test study materials and other [resources](#) available to naturalization applicants and citizenship educators, including information about disability accommodations.

In addition, USCIS shared some of the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic and information about the Citizenship and Integration Grant Program, which awards funding to organizations in support of citizenship preparation and integration efforts.

A total of 635 stakeholders joined this webinar, including attorneys and legal representatives, government employees, advocacy groups, citizenship educators and naturalization applicants. Participants submitted 118 written questions and the speakers answered as many as possible during the engagement. Inquiries covered a wide variety of topics, including processing times; Form N-648, Medical Certification for Disability Exceptions; online filing; fee waivers and citizenship resources and educational materials.

Below is a sample of the questions received:

- Does USCIS plan to return to making hard copies of forms, like the N-400, Application for Naturalization, available and offering an option to order forms by phone?
- How can citizenship educators find out if their local field office is conducting video interviews so they can prepare students?
- What are some of the main reasons Forms N-648, Medical Certification for Disability Exceptions, are found to be insufficient?
- What USCIS resources and educational materials are available to the public to help applicants prepare for the naturalization process and test?
- Are there any updates or changes on the horizon related to naturalization fees and fee waivers that you are able to share with us today?
- Has USCIS reverted to using the 2008 version of the civics test?
- What are the criteria for qualification under the Outstanding Americans by Choice program?

Stakeholders also raised concerns about the application fee, attorney fees, the length of the naturalization process and confusion about the English requirement as the main obstacles to naturalization. Similarly, participants shared that persons with disabilities, residents of rural areas and persons of Central American nationality face disproportionate barriers to the naturalization process.

The CIS Ombudsman will share a complete list of inquiries with USCIS to allow the agency to address the public's concerns. Additionally, the CIS Ombudsman will post the engagement's presentation on its website.

Speakers

- Phyllis A. Coven, CIS Ombudsman, DHS
- Nathan Stiefel, Deputy CIS Ombudsman, DHS
- Bertha Anderson, Chief of Public Engagement, CIS Ombudsman, DHS
- Katherine Culliton-González, Officer for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, DHS
- Felicia Escobar Carrillo, Chief of Staff, USCIS
- Kelly Ryan, Senior Advisor, Office of the Director, USCIS
- Steve McHale, Chief, Office of Citizenship, USCIS
- Claudia Young, Assistant Associate Director, Field Operations Directorate, USCIS
- Wendy González, Citizenship and Family Branch Chief, Office of Policy and Strategy, USCIS