



AMERICAN IMMIGRATION LAWYERS ASSOCIATION

Survey of Users of the 800 Customer Service Number Of the DHS Bureau of Citizenship & Immigration Services

Background and Overview

Meaningful public contact with the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services is critical. More than 5 million applications and petitions that were filed by American citizens, U.S. businesses, lawful permanent residents and persons seeking immigration status or citizenship are currently awaiting action by the BCIS. Inevitably, errors occur: an application gets lost in the system and needs to be tracked down; a name is misspelled on a notice, rendering it useless to the recipient until it is corrected; a document is lost in the mail. If such problems arise in even 5% of these cases—an optimistic estimate of the likely problem rate—some 250,000 cases require follow-up from the applicant or petitioner at any given time. There must be some means to bring these individual problems to the attention of the BCIS so the problems can be corrected.

For applications and petitions filed at regional service centers¹, the public previously was asked to call the service center where the application was pending. On June 9, 2003, the Department of Homeland Security's Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services ("BCIS") cut off telephone access to its service centers, instead directing the public to use its "800" National Customer Service Center ("NCSC").

Since that time, the American Immigration Lawyers Association ("AILA") has been conducting an on-line survey of attorneys, community-based organizations, and members of the public about their experiences with the 800 number. The findings of this survey are attached.

¹ Most immigration-related applications and petitions are filed at BCIS' service centers. The only exception is certain applications filed by and on behalf of spouses, minor children and parents of United States citizens. These latter applications are often filed, under certain circumstances, at local BCIS offices.

Survey Method

The survey was posted on both AILA's public website and on its members-only site. Community-based organizations and AILA members were informed of its presence, and members of the public became aware of it through regular web searches. More than 500 persons responded.

Survey Respondents

Of the persons responding, 68.2% were attorneys or members of law firms, and 1.75% were from community-based organizations, such as church groups and legal assistance clinics. The remaining were mostly members of the public. Thus, a marked majority of respondents were people who deal with the Department of Homeland Security regarding immigration issues on a regular basis, on behalf of clients.

Summary of Results

Respondents were asked to rate their experience with the 800 number on a scale of 1 to 5, 5 being best and 1 being worst. An overwhelming majority--79%--rated the experience unsatisfactory (either 1 or 2), and 63% of respondents gave the lowest rating of 1. Only a bit more than 5% rated the experience good to excellent, with 3% of respondents giving the experience the top rating of 5. These ratings were consistent with the comments received.

The changeover from calls going to the service centers to calls going to the 800 number occurred at the beginning of June. One might conclude that at least some of the problems encountered by callers were "start-up pains", as the agency transitions from one system to another. However, the level of unsatisfactory ratings has been growing, rather than dissipating, over time. AILA performed an initial analysis of survey responses on June 30, 2003. Of the 280 responses received as of June 30, 68% rated their experiences as unsatisfactory (1 or 2). Of the 235 responses since June 30, more than 82% gave unsatisfactory ratings, an increase of 14 percentage points in the rate of dissatisfaction as the program becomes more established.

What made these experiences so bad? It was clear from the comments that wrong information was a major contributor to the negativity of the experiences. But the greatest contributor seemed to be the systemic inability to provide meaningful assistance. Of the 515 respondents, 62% reported that they were not given useful information or assistance. Remarks to the effect that the operators did not have access to information about individual cases permeated the comments. In many instances, the only thing an operator could tell a caller to do was to write a letter to the service center; an effort long recognized as an exercise in futility, as such correspondence is rarely addressed in a timely manner, if at all.

Nearly half—46%--of respondents had called about a problem with a case that was pending at a BCIS office. Yet, the only means within the system to solve such a problem is the futile gesture of writing a letter, or having the operator send a referral to the service center, which then responds to the requester by letter.

Because the survey did not include follow-up from initial responses, AILA was unable to tell how many referrals to service centers resulted in a meaningful response from the service center. But, in the course of AILA's own liaison with the service centers, attorneys have indicated on numerous occasions that they received no response at all from the service center after passage of the 30 days they were told to allow. On calling back to report a lack of response, they were generally told to write a letter to the service center—a familiar, futile piece of advice. Others reported that the responses were sent to the wrong address, and/or that the response provided no meaningful information.

Survey Results

Backgrounds of Persons Responding to Survey

515 Responses were received:

274 (~53.2%) from attorneys
77 (~15%) from paralegals
9 (~1.75%) from CBOs (community-based organizations)
147 (~28.5%) from individuals
8 (~1.5%) from other

Reasons for Contacting the NCSC

(This category allowed survey respondents to answer one of questions 1 – 3, and also fill in the “other” box; therefore, giving us 554 responses rather than 515. The percentages are still based on the 515 respondents).

235 (~46%) to resolve a problem with something already filed
184 (~36%) to find out the status of a pending application/petition
25 (~4.9%) to find out procedures
110 (~21.4%) other

Quality of Experience with NCSC

Experiences on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being worst, 5 being best):

16 (~3.1%) rated 5
12 (~2.3%) rated 4

43 (~8.4%) rated 3
84 (~16.3%) rated 2
322 (~63%) rated 1
38 (~7.4%) gave no rating

Tier 1 or Tier 2 Contact

The survey asked “How many people at NSCS did you speak with?” In general, those who spoke with one person reached only Tier 1 of the NCSC system. Those who spoke with two or more people are generally presumed to have reached Tier 2.

269 (~52%) spoke with one person
113 (~22%) spoke with two people
62 (~12%) spoke with more than two people
71 (~14%) did not answer the question

Outcome of the Call:

122 (~24%) reported that the operator understood the inquiry
145 (~28%) reported that the operator did NOT understand the inquiry
28 (~5.4%) reported that they were given information that was proven to be accurate
65 (~12.6%) reported that they were given information that they were unable to establish was accurate
318 (~62%) reported that they were not given useful information or assistance
17 (~3.3%) reported that their issue was resolved
27 (~5.2%) reported that their issue was not resolved, but the BCIS appeared to be working on it
215 (~42%) reported that their issue was not resolved, and that it did not appear that it would be
15 (~3%) reported that they were given a clear timeline that was satisfactory for resolving their issue
176 (~34%) reported that it was not clear when their issue would be resolved
98 (~19%) reported that the timeline given for resolving the issue was NOT satisfactory

(This question had a “check all that apply” option. The percentages are based on the 515 respondents).

APPENDIX

COMMENTS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

The positive comments centered on:

- Getting to speak with a person very quickly
- The person on the line was helpful, courteous, and friendly
- The calls were transferred to a supervisor for more complex matters
- In the early stages of the program, there were many reports of operators refusing to speak with attorneys or their staff. This problem has decreased significantly, though problems are still reported

The most frequent complaints can be summarized as:

- The operator simply reported what was on the BCIS website, and did not meaningfully explore the problem
- The operator gave wrong/incorrect information and advice.
- There is no way to resolve an urgent/emergency problem.
- The operators suggested that the caller write to the Service Center, a largely futile process, as correspondence, if replied to at all, usually is not addressed until many months after receipt.
- The operators were not knowledgeable about even basic immigration matters.
- Forced to endure unnecessary delays because the 800 number operators could not access the file at the Service Center, and the caller needed to wait to receive a response by mail.
- Operators could not resolve simple corrections on erroneous notices.
- Notwithstanding the positive comments regarding the operators being helpful and friendly, a large number of complaints were reported of operators being rude, and hanging up on callers.
- A common problem that people call about is the case in which they never get a receipt from the Service Center for the filed petition and/or application. The 800 number operators are unable to confirm whether the petition and/or application has been received by the Service Center.

Experiences were relatively equally reported by all groups, be they attorneys, CBOs or members of the public. No particular complaint or positive comment came more frequently from any specific group.

Excerpts from the Comments:

Following are comments received in the survey or directly from AILA members. They are grouped by the issues common to some of the comments, namely:

- *Positive Experiences*
Under the previous system, one had to re-dial dozens of times on average to get a line through to the service center, and then be placed on hold for lengthy periods before talking to a person. The ability to get through quickly, and the courtesy with which the persons commenting were treated, generated the bulk of the positive comments.
- *Wrong Information*
Wrong information can be devastating: the immigration system is largely unforgiving of procedural errors, and a mistake in where, when or how to file for a benefit, or in whether to stay in the U.S. or leave under given circumstances, frequently means the difference between whether one receives the immigration benefit (such as permanent residence or citizenship) or is deported.
- *Rude/Hung Upon on Caller*
The minimum requirement of any customer service operation should be courteous and professional behavior.
- *Unable to Address Urgent Matters*
In the immigration context, emergencies frequently arise: people need to travel to visit sick relatives; eligibility for benefits will be lost if the BCIS does not act in a timely way; important business trips arise. It is critical that any immigration system include a way to have emergencies addressed.
- *Bring Back the Old System*
Many commenters found that the old system, deeply flawed as it was, worked better than the 800 number works now.
- *Not Helpful*
A great many callers found that the operators at the 800 number simply couldn't help. Because no alternative means for obtaining assistance exists, this leaves numerous problems with no mechanism for fixing them.

- *Refused to Speak to Attorney/Paralegal*
Because the operators did not seem to understand the attorney's role in the process, they would not speak to these designated representatives about a given case. This is representative of the confusion that seems rampant in the system.
- *No Access from Outside U.S.*
These applications and petitions are filed on behalf of foreign nationals, many of whom are outside the United States waiting for BCIS to finish processing their application so they can enter. But, if the case gets stuck, they have no way to contact BCIS because the 800 number is not available outside the U.S., and no alternative mechanism exists for resolving a problem.

THE COMMENTS

Positive Experiences

- They are courteous, but without case specific information, they cannot provide much useful assistance to the caller other than to answer general questions.
- Faster to get through to the 800 number.
- Did have positive results once (received approval on advance parole document that had been pending for over 6 months).
- Thankfully, at least the IIO was courteous as against other complaints.
- Operator was very professional and seemed to know what she was doing.
- Positive, but they were limited in the types of problems they could resolve.
- My first experience was quite pleasant. The lady was very cooperative and even gave me her ID #, when I asked for it. I got a response (POSITIVE/HELPFUL), from the Nebraska Service Center, within 10 days. It was an HRIFA case where the gentleman had his I-765 approved but almost a month past and did not receive the actual EAD. I called the "800" number and gave all the relevant info requested and within 10 days they sent me the EAD because they said there was a problem the first time they sent it to him.
- This time I have something GOOD to report about the NCSC! I called to report a name typo, and got a corrected Re-Entry Permit in under a month!
- I called and got through almost immediately. The person on the line was very courteous took down my details and told me that my case should have been touched in 16 months (it was past that). She then told me she would send an enquiry to CSC and that I should hear from them within 3 weeks (I hope this is true).

- I have found the 800 Customer Service to be helpful with matters they are able to assist with. Generally, it is easier and faster to be connected to a live person at the 800 Customer Service line. Also, I have had instances where the information officer took the initiative to transfer my call to an officer who could help me with complex issues.

Wrong Information

- I was given information that DHS subsequently indicated was inaccurate which resulted in my spouse being detained for deportation proceedings.
- Complete lack of knowledge with immigration laws and procedures. Information Officer said "I learn something new everyday here" and the supervisor said if someone enters under an Immigrant Visa they are sent a Welcome Notice with a Receipt Number.
- I have been told three different processing times now and have been told three different times to request to expedite only to have an officer tell me differently.
- Person indicated that advance parole is needed for I-485 applicants even with valid H-1B - wrong answer if one still works for the H-1B-sponsoring company.
- I was told that no inquiry could be made on my petition, even though it is 8 months outside the processing time report published by the VSC, because the operator said it was still within the processing time provided by the service center. But he couldn't tell me what that processing time was.
- The information given by the rep was not correct. The EAD needed to be re-issued by TSC and not the District Office. The NCSC representative should have tried to determine what kind of EAD had a problem before sending the client to the District office for a replacement. In fact the client waited for hours at the District Office only to be informed that he needed to file at TSC.
- We were told that an inquiry could not be made until the case had been pending for over 120 days, despite the fact that this case is 60 days overdue per the latest published processing times. The representative was courteous, but did not have access to the right information.
- Person at NCSC insisted that date of application for immediate relative petition and adjustment of status determined whether person was a conditional permanent resident or not and that I-551 was correct. Advised client that attorney and examiner who stated otherwise were incorrect and I-551 card was correct and

spouse should be a conditional resident. [Ed. Note: the date on which the person adjusted status determines whether the person is a conditional resident.]

- I was given inaccurate and incomplete information concerning an already approved I-140. The supervisor indicated she did not show that the I-140 had been approved. I was actually calling about an I-824 to notify the consulate of the I-140 approval. Very frustrating and wasted my time calling.
- I received an I-140 approval notice for a software engineer, wherein the text read that he was a NATIONAL WAIVER PHYSICIAN and said that his I-485 would not be adjudicated until he had served 3-5 years in an underserved area. In the old days, I would have just phoned the VSC, and they would have taken care of it in 5 minutes by sending an amended approval notice. However, I was also concerned that the I-485 had been put in some sort of "on hold" status and would never be adjudicated. On June 26, 2003 I phoned the I-800 # and the clerk took down verbatim my inquiry. Then, however, she referred me to a new line for Employment and Investor-related immigration - 800 357-2099 for "better service." I called. The first guy I spoke with told me to file an I-824 and when I argued with him, yelled at me. I asked why I had to pay a fee when it was a BCIS mistake. I also said that the form I-824 was not used to correct errors. When he insisted, I suggested we both look at the form together, knowing full well there were no appropriate boxes on the form. He saw that as well and referred me to another officer (2nd tier, I assume). Unfortunately, I was disconnected, so I called back. Got a new 1st tier clerk, who this time told me the appropriate procedure was to re-file the I-140. I was really outraged - asked her with fee, without? With or without supporting documentation - no way, this can't be right. She, too, yelled at me. Finally she sent me to a 2nd tier officer, who, thankfully, confirmed that both of these people were dead WRONG, however, she then proceeded to give me equally bogus advice: namely to fax my comments with appropriate copies to the "Expedite Request" fax line at the VSC, and to mail it as well. This, I did, and instantaneously received a rejection from the VSC saying that that line was for Expedite Requests only and not for data entry mistakes. Next day, I had to wait on hold for another 30 minutes to tell this officer that her advice was also wrong (politely, though). She was very apologetic and baffled because these were the instructions she had received. In the end, she ended up taking down verbatim my query with the intention of transferring it to the VSC. What should have taken 5 minutes took several hours, and in the end I have no confidence that I will receive any resolution.
- Our inquiry dealt with the transfer of an I-130 4th preference case that was to have occurred in 1991 from NSC to TSC. The case in fact was transferred to the National Records Office. We called NSC before it went off-line to request the transfer. Now the 2nd tier of the NCSC is telling us (1) that it was transferred to Chicago (no it was not) (2) then it was transferred to a local office in Texas (no) then (3) finally that it was "in transit"(??). The last thing the IO said was to place an inquiry into the TSC even though TSC is requesting the file back from NSC.

This system is terrible! If there is no direct access to the Service Center with experienced people, there is no way this will work!

- After a moderate delay (not as long as I had been given to expect) of a few minutes, I spoke with a representative about where I can file an I-130/I-485 Packet for a couple who lives in Stafford County, VA as we weren't sure whether that was Arlington or Norfolk jurisdiction and the representative, after asking me a lot of questions about the status of the immigrant beneficiary as if he knew everything, told me wrong information: 1. that if the beneficiary is no longer in status then the joint filing cannot be done at the local office and the I-130 must be filed first with VSC and then the I-485 can be filed later after the I-130 is approved; and if status is OK and they can file concurrently then the Packet would be filed in Arlington. When I called the automated system to double-check because another attorney had thought the jurisdiction to be Norfolk, the automated system said that Norfolk has the jurisdiction over the case. Also, the other attorney told me that the I-130/I-485 can be filed concurrently even if the immigrant beneficiary is out of status.
- Numerous clients have called and have received incorrect information: Such as a Honduran who wanted to apply for TPS for the first time, was told he could and he only had to prove that he had been here for the required time, not that he had to qualify for late registration. In fact he asked about late registration and he explained that he did not qualify for any of them requirements and he was still told he could apply. Other than that the response time has been great. They just need to have correct information.
- I called to ask a procedural question about applying for humanitarian parole. The first two people told me that it could not be done by a person in the U.S. despite the fact that form I-131 lists exactly that option. When I pointed that out, they had no response. I asked to speak to a manager and she confirmed that it could, in fact, be done. She seemed somewhat knowledgeable, but not completely so, such that I could not rely on her answers. When I pointed out that the previous people had given me incorrect information, she was not surprised and gave no indication that she would correct the situation.
- Call to the NCSC about Advance Parole approved but approval notice and AP documents never received (on employment-based I-485 pending at CSC): NCSC person first tells us that it takes 90 days to process I-131s. When informed that the Advance Parole was approved (for the 2nd time), NCSC person states that in order to get an approval notice, we need to file an I-824 and pay \$140 filing fee. NCSC person then tells me that the advance parole documents are at local BCIS office and we should check there (even though it is an employment-based case at the CSC). NCSC person then tells us that they have no way to check addresses. In short, we were not helped and given wrong information. This was my office's first experiment with calling the NCSC and it will likely be the last.

- Called up the 800 number to find out why the DS-2019 was not returned with the change of status to J-1. They did not know that a DS-2019 replaced the IAP-66; they kept on referring to the pink copy of the IAP-66. They told me to get in touch with the USIA. I told them the USIA does not exist anymore. They kept on insisting that the individual gets the stamp on the DS-2019 when they enter the United States. I told them that the person did not enter the United States for a change of status. After fifteen minutes of going back and forth and with the Operator clearly not understanding what was going on and after being held on line for fifteen minutes while she consulted with a supervisor who apparently knew even less, she advised me to send a letter to the Service Center regarding the DS-2019. We have found the 800 number to be totally useless.
- We filed for advance parole and the web inquiry system says that it is taking 400+ days to process the I-131. So it seems it is possible to get the permanent residence before the advance parole? We called the 1 800 number and they say we checked the wrong box and asked for a re-entry permit and not advance parole. I double checked our filings, and we checked the appropriate advance parole box.
- I called to find out why the I-730 asylee relative petition filed by my client's wife last November had not yet been adjudicated. The I-797 said processing time was 165-190 days, which have long since passed. Client is in removal proceedings with upcoming merit hearing date and IJ said there will be no continuances granted for the I-730. I called 800 number to find out why the petition is stalled. The officer who answered my call said I should either pay a \$1,000.00 premium processing fee (which of course is not available for I-730s) or send my client to the US embassy in home country to apply for refugee status (which as far as I know has never, ever been granted to someone in my client's circumstances in his particular home country, not to mention that he's in removal proceedings anyway and therefore cannot leave). He was not able to give me the name and phone number of anyone at the NSC who could help, or connect me to any such person.
- My lawful permanent resident client called the NCSC to ask about the process for petitioning for her minor daughter. The gentleman who answered the call did not identify himself by name or identity number. She was given the following incorrect advice: 1. Permanent residents are no longer eligible to file for family members, and my client would have to wait until she becomes a citizen. 2. My client became a permanent resident on 1/29/2001 and has a 3-year residence requirement. He told her that she could file her application 90 days before the 3-year anniversary and flatly stated that she could apply on October 29, 2003. The earliest date on which she could apply would be October 31, 2003; if the BCIS received the application earlier, it would be rejected.
- They told a US citizen married to a nonimmigrant to file an I-130 at the service center, without informing them of the possible option to apply for adjustment of status at a local BCIS office.

- I checked on a family based adjustment case for a spouse of a permanent resident and 3 minor children with a current priority date. The Officer was adamant (wrongly so) that the children could not adjust as derivatives of a preference petition. She insisted that no more than 1 person may use any one I-130 petition. She advised me to withdraw the I-485's of the dependent children, file an I-130 for them, wait for a current priority date and then refile the I-485's.
- Many clients have told me that they called the 800 number several times to ask the same question, and each time they were given a different wrong answer. Most recently, a conditional resident called to ask how to renew her expiring green card and she was sent form I-90 which she dutifully completed. After not hearing a response she called the 800 number a few times and was told each time that the case was fine and just pending. No one ever mentioned that she should have filed an I-751. Finally, she received a notice of termination of her conditional resident status from INS for failure to file I-751.
- Client called the 800 # because he has discovered his wife's H-4 status expired Jan. 3, 2003. Attorney advised she MUST leave the country before 180 days passes, or risk being barred for 3 years. Initial person answering phone transferred client to "officer." Officer advised wife does not have to leave and all client has to do is file a form I-539. Officer specifically advised "chance of denial of extension is 'nil'." [Ed. Note: our members' experience is the opposite: that this application would likely be denied. Following this customer service officer's office likely would result in this person being barred from entry to the U.S. for 3 years.]
- A client, on the advice of the call center, filed an I-129F for his wife. He told them three times they were already married and the call center staffer said that he needed to file the I-129F because they had married in Russia instead of the US. Of course, he didn't find out this mistake until later when the wife showed up at the consulate to claim the fiancée visa and was told they had to start all over again.

Rude/Hung Up on Caller

- The people answering the phone do not have the knowledge necessary to assist. Second, they are reading right off of the website, which I can do without having to wait 30 minutes to be hung up on.
- I was thoroughly appalled by the rudeness of the person that I spoke to. If I had had the foresight to write down the Officer's name, I would have sent in a written complaint.
- This last time I called the NCSC I was referred to an officer who was very rude and insensitive. He told me that bringing a fiancé to the US was "NOT an emergency and that there was no possibility to expedite an I 129f". When I told

him that the first person had referred me to him for just that reason he hung up on me. Never have I been rude or loud or inconsiderate to anyone at the NCSC, however I cannot say the same about them.

- When time is of the essence, it is difficult to be placed on hold for such a long time (50 minutes), only to be disconnected. The staffing of additional BCIS officers to assist with inquiries beyond the knowledge of the customer service representatives would be quite useful.
- Very rude people. I tried to get a supervisor but was unsuccessful.
- She was rude and short with me, it made me wonder how an alien, already intimidated by the system, would have felt.
- This problem of the person hanging up when the caller expresses any level of disagreement or unhappiness is apparently endemic and not restricted to calls from attorneys. My client is a very sweet person who would never say anything rude to the "authority" on the other end, or to anyone else for that matter. It is a disgrace that he was treated as a child, and then hung up on.
- I had a question regarding one of our TPS applicants. The representative asked me sarcastically how much I knew about TPS. When I told her a great deal, she was again sarcastic with her answer to my question. Then she said our client had the option to not re-register and just lose his TPS. I asked her to please not be so argumentative with me. She said "You started it," almost as if a five year old would say about their sibling.
- I called up re: an I-131 that was approved and document mailed, but it never arrived. So I need a new Travel Document reissued. NCSC didn't know what an I-131 was. They suggested I file a new application (!), the first application took 9 months to be approved. When I explained that all I wanted was the document/a duplicate reissued, they didn't know what to do. They said that they would transfer me to an Immigration Officer. After another 20 minutes on hold the Immigration Officer spoke to me. He was the rudest person that I have ever spoken to. He kept telling me to check my case on line. Which (1) I had, and (2) wasn't even relevant to my inquiry. He flatly refused to help, said that I should write to the Service Center, and then hung up on me following some coarse words of chastisement.
- The officer laughed at my request that he contact the Vermont Service Center to try to get an overdue USC I-130 put in the adjudications track to be decided. He said "I can't make INS do its job - you can write the Director of the INS Service Center. They haven't done their job for 25 years. You can file a complaint on form I-847 with the Commissioner or call your congressman."

- I am reporting what a client told me today. He tried to find out when he might be considered for adjustment of status on the application he filed as an asylee. The person told him there were "15 billion" people waiting. He told her that that could not be possible since that was close to the population of the world and she hung up.
- Representative was overtly hostile and wanted to know why I was calling this number. He said to call the service center. When I reminded him that the service center numbers have been disconnected, he became even more belligerent and told me to write a letter. Huge customer service black eye. It was obvious that no training or transition information had been provided and that no effort would be made to resolve anything and that there was no penalty for surliness.

Unable to Address Urgent Matters

- My client will be given voluntary departure and forced to leave the US if the BCIS does not do its job before his merit hearing date. Once he departs from US, he will face 10 year bar due to over one year in unlawful status prior to departure. The current processing time is 330 days for I-730, and the officer did not know and could not find out how much longer we will have to wait. If my client is forced to leave the US before his I-730 is adjudicated, he will in effect be denied due process and justice. The IJ insists that no continuance will be granted because all cases must be completed within 8 months according to the OCIJ. Also, there are two children who have been petitioned by my client's wife on separate I-730s. They are in the home country and continue to receive death threats and have to move from place to place every few weeks to keep from being harmed. Asylum is meant to protect people, yet it is not a very high priority for the BCIS.
- Very distressing to get this type of service on an urgent matter. There should be a way for urgent inquiries (things that have time sensitive concerns) to be addressed...maybe email. Calling NSCS and having them write a letter and then having to wait for a letter goes completely against the idea of customer service...it takes too long to get assistance.
- In many instances, the person answering the 1-800 number will simply tell the caller to "write to the Service Center." This is not a useful response if you have a case that is problematic, needs immediate attention, is 6 months behind processing times, etc.
- Maybe it is too new, but I need to be able to obtain information when I call. Otherwise why call? Sending a letter is an exercise in futility if I need an answer sooner than 60 days.
- What is our recourse in an emergency? My client received a notice from VSC of intent to revoke an O-1 petition with a 30-day response time. (The notice was

apparently triggered by a "poison pen" letter from a former, disgruntled employee and was not in any way initiated or authorized by the employer as claimed in the notice). The notice referred to an "investigative report" and said the report was enclosed. However, it was not. I called this morning with an emergency request to obtain the report, which is critical to respond. My call was elevated to the second tier who advised that he had absolutely no way to contact the service centers and was "helpless" in assisting me to obtain the report. He advised me to write to VSC.

I also advised the 2d tier officer that the notice was not sent to me but rather to prior counsel even though I have the most recent G-28 on file and asked that I be recognized as attorney of record. He again said he was unable to assist and advised me to write to VSC.

Bring Back the Old System

- The people at NCSC are untrained and unhelpful. It seems they may not be given access to enough information to truly assist us. It is a waste of our time to call NCSC because generally we have more knowledge and information than they do, yet we have no other means of satisfying our issues. PLEASE HELP US GET BACK THE SERVICE CENTER PHONE LINES!
- In the past it would have been very easy to correct an error on the application form over the phone. Now I was told it must be submitted in writing. The person on the phone didn't even know what an EAD category was.
- Frustrating at best. This is a big step backwards. BCIS should cancel this system and revert back to the old one but with more well-trained IIOs, plus direct fax or e-mails.
- I made the simplest request twice. Had I been able to call VSC directly, it would have been solved weeks ago. There has to be a better system than what has now been created. At best, it would have taken about three weeks to resolve the issue. There has to be a system to secure a resolution more quickly. It has now been 38 days since I called without any resolution in sight.
- We have not gotten any further than we were eight months ago. The original receipt notice said it would take 80 to 140 days from the date of the receipt to process this type of case. We didn't get anything resolved. I don't think this customer service is of any help at all. I liked being able to talk to the officers at the individual immigration centers better the way it was before.
- While I was happy to wait for hours to get through to the Service Centers, I most of the time felt assured that at least I was ultimately able to receive a name or

contact person, who was able to assist. At the NCSC, it seems hard to even pass by the initial person answering the phone, and that after I wait generally a long time. If I can, I avoid using the NCSC - it is a waste of my time and a waste of the client's money.

- I got better service when I was able to call the service lines for the individual service centers. Now that it is on a national service line, they can't provide any information as to when it was assigned to an officer -- in fact, the only information they have is what is already on the website.
- NCSC is an incredible waste of time and expense for the government and for the clients and attorneys. Correcting a spelling error could have been handled in less than 5 minutes by an information officer at the Service Center (once we were able to get through on the phone).
- We need to have live assistance at the Service Centers again. There is no way for the persons in DC to resolve issues on cases pending with the Service Centers!
- There are too many people in the middle. Real problems are solved by direct contact, often w/a supervisor, at VSC.
- I filed an I-130 at the TSC 22 months ago for an alien in proceedings. The TSC's own procedures require immediate remand of such cases for aliens in proceedings. Formerly, it was at least possible to fax the RSC's "product line" officials to correct routine problems like this. No more. They have been replaced by the BCIS's toll-free 800 #. All direct contact with Service Centers has been eliminated. Letter-writing and AILA liaison assistance are now the only means of access. Bad, bad, bad mistake.
- PLEASE bring back the IIOs at the service centers. At least after a long wait one could get an answer. Two recent examples: I asked for an expedite of an I-131 and was told to write to the service center. That is good for another 30-45 days delay! I have asked where a K-1 that was lost at VSC and resubmitted might be. No way the NCSC responded!
- It's the worst. It says whatever is written on website. Previous one was better where we got a chance to speak to IIO's. Would request BCIS to start that again.

Not Helpful

- Very unsatisfactory. Most of the time on the call was spent with the officer taking down redundant information about my and my client's name and contact information, information I would have thought she had access to in the database.

- They are polite, that's about the only good thing. Besides that, they are absolutely useless.
- Useful to people who do not know how to file things and need help, but completely useless to attorneys/paralegals in assisting in problem cases where it is clear that the BCIS has made an error.
- Using the 800 number is a waste of time and resources. The people taking calls are not trained well enough to handle even simple issues, and the inquiry system/form asks for information that is not relevant (requiring the date of birth of the employer????).
- NCSC is useless as a mechanism to determine whether case is off track or being adjudicated, when case is months beyond SC processing report date.
- I feel that I have no alternative but to seek help from my Representative and Senators, something that I am loath to do, but the NCSC agent refused outright to provide any assistance and I think that my request for assistance is reasonable given the time that has passed and the typical time that is required to process my type of case.
- The call receivers are basically similar to the folks who get your order at McDonald's and give change! Nothing I saw was beneficial or re-assuring.
- Their information on my case is the same as the online status check, and both are way outdated. The representative is courteous however useless. It is a waste of my time and the tax payer's money to support this system.
- Although the operator was very nice (which is a change for BCIS) she acknowledged that she could not do one thing for me.
- The NCSC is not able to provide more specific details on case status for applications filed; more resources should be made to have centralized data on case progress from case workers that could be accessed nationally.
- Probably our worst experience so far is the individual who referred us to the old (nonfunctional) VSC phone number and told us to call that number. Request to speak to supervisors or to have the query sent to the Service Center are usually ignored.
- I called to correct a BCIS error on an I-129 approval notice (an H1B extension approval did not become valid until 3/2004, when we asked for 3/2003). I was on hold for approximately 15 minutes before a woman answered. I explained the problem and she told me I'd have to file a Form I-824 to have the error corrected. After explaining how ridiculous this advice was she said she would put me through to an officer. Instead I was disconnected. When I called back a second

time, I was told I could speak to an officer but was put on hold for over 30 minutes before I hung up. I called the next day and was told I could not speak to an officer. After arguing, I was again put through to an officer and was placed on hold for approximately 20 minutes. When an officer finally picked up I was told to fax and mail a copy of the approval notice and explain the error. The fax number I was given is not in service.

- I gave my name/EAC number. Officer couldn't even confirm my address in the BCIS record (she said she cannot see the case, if so why we need this number!). No more info than the online status check (officer just read the online status page to me). I finally got a reply letter in 2 weeks, but guess what? The name in the letter is completely different from my name while the EAC number is correct (I never changed my name by the way) and the address is almost correct except the zip code is different in the last digit. I wonder how come this reply letter is typed by people manually, because BCIS has indeed stored my correct name/address and I also got a re-fingerprint notice from BCIS a few days later with correct name/address.
- The examiners were soothing, courteous. They were able to access my TSC files through the CLIAMS system. BUT THEY ARE POWERLESS TO ACT! They simply refer all callers back to the regional RSC, where the cycle of endless non-response and stonewalling continues. THIS NEW SYSTEM IS A CYNICAL AND TRANSPARENT ATTEMPT TO REPLACE THE OLD SYSTEM -- WHICH FOR ALL ITS FAULTS HELD OUT AT LEAST THE POSSIBILITY OF IN-HOUSE CORRECTION OF IN-HOUSE PROBLEMS -- WITH A NEW SYSTEM THAT CREATES THE APPEARANCE OF CLIENT SERVICE WHILE ACTUALLY REDUCING IT. IT IS A POSITIVE STEP BACKWARDS. IT WARRANTS CONGRESSIONAL OVERSIGHT AND HEARINGS. COUNT ME AMONG THE FRUSTRATED USERS WHO WOULD CHEERFULLY SO TESTIFY!
- NCSC person seems to follow a script and I have the impression that she was not real knowledgeable about immigration law. I do not think she understood my request. She just took some information with no indication how her taking the information would correct the error.
- It is very frustrating that the person you are initially talking to, does not understand what you are talking about, even the basics such as an inquiry about change of status. While I do not expect that I receive legal information and solutions, I at least assume that the people are familiar with the basic vocabulary of immigration law. One time, I asked about how the BCIS handles a particular situation relating to my client. I repeated my question several times and the person gave me the processing time four times, before she indicated that I need to speak with an immigration officer as she was not familiar with the inquiry.

- I have contacted the NCSC approximately ten times, none of which resulted in helpful information or resolution of a problem(s). A written inquiry to the Service Center involved--as instructed by NCSC--has also gone unanswered (6/1/03).
- I called about an I-131 Advance Parole application filed with the NSC on or about March 22, 2003. The husband's application which was in the same filing package was processed several weeks ago, and the NSC processing times say that they are working on cases filed May 8, 2003. The operator would not take my information because the NSC has told them that it is taking 6 months to process this type of application.
- On June 30, NSC faxed client a notice with the completely unsatisfactory response that the application is "awaiting review by an officer" but there is no processing time assigned, and I have no confidence that the case is out of the Black Hole of security clearance.
- This case has been pending since 06/2001, and the response we received states "Due to the pending caseload at the NSC, the processing time of your I-485 application has been extended. Allow extra time for an Officer to review your application. Furthermore, if all initial evidence was not included with your application, or a question arose during adjudication that required an RFE, additional time would be needed." As you can see, this is not very helpful.
- I concluded that in order to obtain any useful information on pending cases, we will need to use congressional liaisons.
- We received an RFE that only listed the receipt #, not the alien's name. We called the 800# to find out the alien's name. After speaking to an information officer and a "supervisor", they would not provide the alien's name (despite the fact that we are listed as the attorneys of record). We were told to fax the RFE to the Texas Service Center and to request the alien's name. This is completely absurd.
- After writing to the Service Center requesting an amended approval notice (due to Service error), I was told to wait 30 days for the issue to be resolved. If at that point it still was not resolved, I should call them again. It has been well over that time and I still don't have the amended approval notice and, honestly, don't expect it to come either.
- About 30 days after the call, I received a notice stating that the case was still pending and that I should allow at least 90 days before calling again. The applicant's name was misspelled on the notice, and it said nothing about the reason for the delay.
- The issue is with a specific service center; I had been working with a rep. there. Since I cannot call them anymore, my problem seems to have been dropped. The folks at the new general number don't understand the problem, and aren't willing

to try to understand it. They just tell me to "write a letter"; I have tried this in the past, and have never received a response (not ONCE). I now have no way to follow up on the problem; to date, it has not been resolved.

- Since the child entered and was admitted as a permanent resident under Section 211, there was no "Receipt" Number and only an A # Both the Initial Information Officer and Supervisor claimed that they are unable to check the status of an I-551 card without a Receipt Number and that they CANNOT access any records with only an A #.
- I was pleasantly shocked to have my first attempt go through and I spoke w/ a person. I was inquiring for an individual who had applied for HRIFA, had had his case transferred to Boston, was interviewed in May 2002, and was informed by the officer that he would receive a written decision in the mail. The alien had heard nothing, wanted to go to BCIS to renew his EAD, but was nervous to go b/c he didn't know if his application had been adjudicated w/o his being notified. The person I spoke with, when I asked her if she could let me know the status of his application, said that b/c of security concerns, they did not have access to that information. She said all she could do was forward a request to Boston INS and they would respond in writing to the alien. I declined her offer and will go to BCIS myself to inquire though this will consume a number of hours. Maybe there is something I am missing re security concerns, but I fail to see how providing information about the status of an application can compromise security. Failing to provide information about this type of a matter seems unnecessarily complicated and much too slow.
- The VSC issued an H-1B Approval Notice in error by notifying a consulate abroad instead of issuing the I-94. This was a change of status from F-1 to H-1B without any issues that would have required the employee to leave the country to process a visa. A telephone call to an IO at VSC on or about 5/04/03 (prior to the 800 number only) confirmed that the VSC made a mistake and that they would get it corrected. A month later, we received nothing. I then had to call the 800 number directly and told them the story. Their response: WRITE A LETTER TO THE VSC. Like it would ever get to the file or ever be addressed in a timely manner. This employee's OPT expired June 1, 2003. I then contacted a Congressman's office for their assistance in making a congressional inquiry. The matter is still to date unresolved and this employee will have no choice but to leave the country and return after processing abroad b/c there is no effective way to get the BCIS to correct their own mistake in a timely manner. For the 800 number to tell me to "write a letter" is completely un-useful and ridiculous.
- Called to check on an approved I 140. It was approved in Feb. Have not received Packet III from NVC. NVC says it does not have the file. The BCIS rep says because we received an approval notice she will not make an inquiry to NVC regarding the file. It appears the file was never forwarded to the NVC, but yet I

am not permitted to make an inquiry to the BCIS. The rep says that the NVC must request the file. This is a catch 22 situation.

- Every time I have to call the national 800 number it's totally a disaster. The officers are nice and courteous but they know nothing about immigration. On one occasion I had an officer (after 20 minutes of conversation) suggest a solution - that I contact the Texas Service Center!

On another occasion the online status showed a case was pending, but the district office showed it as denied. It was a TSC case. Obviously the clients were not aware of that nor did they receive an RFE. The 800 number officer explained to me that they are using the same online case status system as the public, which is obviously not the same internal immigration system, and therefore don't have the REAL information for some reason.

On another occasion after not receiving receipts for cases I contacted them to send me duplicates, and still waiting 2 months later to get them (promised 10-14 days), even though I called in 3 times to have them resent.

When the officers responding do not know immigration, and have no real contact with the service center, it's obviously not good. If they had level 1 and level 2 people (level 2 people having contact with the service center or are in the service centers) it can at least have some effect. My experience has been that the 800 number is totally useless, except for using it to schedule fingerprinting appointments.

- We filed an I-140, I-485 and I-765 simultaneously for a client who is a nurse. We received receipts from BCIS for the I-140 and I-485. Upon not receiving a receipt for the I-765 I telephoned the customer service department and inquired about the I-765 application. I supplied the operator with receipt numbers for the application and petition, as well as our client's alien number and name. I was told there was no record of the I-765 application being received and they would send a request to the Vermont Service Center to investigate. Approximately three weeks later, the Service center responded to the client directly that there was no record of the application. I found the cancelled check for the application cashed by BCIS and made another call to the center. I was told to write to the Service center, sending a copy of the check and the application, thereby not having to pay the fee again. Again, I was told there was no record of the application. I noticed on the cancelled check that a receipt number was printed. Upon checking the online status information, it was noted the application was pending. I called the center again, gave them the receipt number and was told that the application was indeed pending although we had not received a receipt. I was told to wait until an approval was granted and if we were not notified at this point then to reapply. It appears the customer service is not in direct contact with the service center and therefore their information, or lack thereof is useless to resolve issues. I was not

told to look at the cancelled check to find a receipt number. Their wait and see attitude is detrimental to our client who filed a timely application.

- Today, 7/25/03, one of our paralegals called to check the status on a case. She spoke with an officer who refused to provide her any information since she was not the attorney who had signed the G-28. When she asked to speak to a supervisor, she was transferred to a Supervisor and again was told that she could not give her any information since she was not the actual attorney on record.

On a later call today, our paralegal got through again to the same officer who asked if she was the attorney on record and our paralegal stated that she was calling from the attorney's office. The call proceeded, however, but the officer could not complete a status inquiry because there was an RFE sent out (Notice Date 4/14/03), and response was not received until 4/24/03. She said that this adds 9 days to processing times. She was then advised to call back on 8/4/03 since the system wouldn't allow her to complete an inquiry.

Our paralegal also asked to check the status of a pending I-140 case beyond processing times and was told that the system would not allow it since I-140's were now taking 4 months. She was told to call back 9/24/2003 and that processing times were constantly changing.

On another call that took place a couple weeks ago, another one of our paralegals was asked for the birth date and nationality of our client's HR representative. When we advised the officer that we don't collect that information, the officer asked for the birth date and nationality of our paralegal so she could complete the status inquiry form.

- We have found the NCSC 1-800 number to be very unhelpful. A general complaint is that when the caller asks to speak to a second level officer, they are advised to write a letter. Other more specific complaints include the following:
 - The NCSC has not been able to confirm the attorney of record.
 - They have been unable to confirm receipt of cancelled checks in a case where the FP fee was paid yet the applicant received a new FP fee notice.
 - When inquiring about an I-485 case that was substantially outside normal processing times, they have been unable to provide information, asking us to write a letter instead.
 - They have been unable to tell us whether a case has been transferred to a different service center.

- They have been unable to provide FP results.
- They have been unable to verify an address.

Even when we do write a letter as instructed, we do not receive acknowledgment that the letter was received, and to date have not received timely responses to letters.

- I want you to know that I was told by an NCSC representative that the field in the email that they complete to send to the Service Center is extremely small, so they cannot communicate a long or complex question or send an email about more than one issue in a given case.
- I called to find out status of the case because 10 months had passed since filing of the I-129. All the representative could tell me was that normal processing was 8 months. Then she gave me a phone number to another automated system that referred me back to the NCSC number.
- I have called the 800 number for the NCSC several times during the month of July 2003. In general I find calling this number very frustrating, particularly because the customer service "specialists" are not able to give any more information on my case than that visible on the BCIS webpage. They could not tell me what the projected processing time for my I-765 application was, even though it has now taken 45 more days than the maximum processing time listed on the BCIS homepage. When calling to report an address change the individual I was connected to stated he could not record my address change even though this was the option I had selected at the automated menu. I had to make three (3) separate phone calls to the NCSC 800 number before I was able to speak with a customer service specialist who would record my address change.
- I have been waiting for a "request for additional info" from the Texas processing center that was mailed to me over a month ago. I was told that if I did not receive this letter within 14 days to call the NCSC. I called and was told to call back after it had been 30 days. I called again (after 30 days) and was told that if I didn't notify the Texas center directly by fax to let them know that I have not received this letter, then my case could be thrown out. The NCSC gave me a fax number, later to find out that the BCIS no longer uses direct fax numbers or phone numbers. The NCSC does not know that? I called again and they took my information and said an agent would contact me. It has been a month now, and I haven't heard anything and still no letter. I also have been waiting 196 days, when the estimated processing time frame on my receipt says 150-180 days.

- I explained that we had not received a response and over 30 days had passed, and the operator said, be patient. I explained that I believed the Service Center was supposed to respond to a telephone inquiry in writing within 30 days, and he kind of laughed, and said that the 30 days is only an "approximate response date.... not a hard rule... an estimated guess". I asked for his IO number (which, according to AILA, IOs are suppose to have) and all he said he was "required" to provide was his last name.
- Tried to call to find out why we didn't receive a receipt for an I-765. The lady said that they don't issue receipts for I-765s to some people, and that we can get the receipt number from the website and check the status that way. You cannot get a receipt from the website! I had to order a copy of the cancelled check to get it. I don't think we should have to order copies of cancelled checks to get case numbers. Also, I don't understand why they "won't issue receipts to some people"--what does that mean?

Refused to Speak to Attorney

- Even though I have G-28s on file, apparently the officers cannot access this information and "cannot release any information because of the Privacy Act." Tier 2 person told me they cannot answer questions re status of a case, only procedural questions. However she then went on to say that if the alien was in my office and would authorize my talking to the BCIS person, then she could give me answers. This does not make sense. While both people were nice and polite, this was a useless waste of my time. Attorneys now have no way to get any meaningful information about particular cases at the Service Centers.
- I contacted the NCSC to make a referral to the California Service Center because our office received an I-140 Approval Notice with an incorrect classification. I was immediately told to write a letter. I explained that I understood I was able to make a referral. I was put on hold and the Contact Representative went "to check." When the Representative returned and learned I was calling from an attorney's office, she insisted I provide her with a "G-28 Number." When I asked for an explanation of what this number was and offered to provide the Attorney's State License Number or the Receipt Number, the Representative further insisted that I provide the "G-28 Number" and rudely commented that if I was calling from an attorney office, I "should know what a 'G-28 Number' is." I asked to speak with her Supervisor and was immediately disconnected.
- I called the number to get a status update on an I-129 petition which has passed its stated processing period. The "representative" told me that, despite being the attorney on record, I would ONLY be able to get a status check if, (unbelievably) BOTH THE PETITIONING EMPLOYER and THE BENEFICIARY were sitting there BESIDE me when I called!! She further stated that even if the Petitioner

called, he would only be able to get a status check if the BENEFICIARY was sitting beside him.

Refused to Speak to Paralegal

- My paralegal informed me she was on hold with the National Customer Service Line for 35 minutes this afternoon to inquire about a pending I-765 for a dependent L2 spouse, and when she was finally connected with an operator, the operator would not give my paralegal any information because my paralegal was not the attorney of record! The paralegals in our office have in the past contacted the Nebraska Service Center countless times, and they contact the National Customer Service Line regularly, and have never been refused assistance because they were not the G-28 attorney of record. In response to my paralegal's question, the operator informed my paralegal that this was NOT a new rule, rather the rule was the same as always, and had just never been properly enforced.

No Access From Outside U.S.

- I have a client temporarily residing in Canada who'd like to contact BCIS (regarding her long-overdue I-551 Lawful Permanent Resident card). The Call Center's toll free 1-800 number will not accept calls from outside the U.S., and I've yet to locate an alternate number for Call Center. As such, my client is completely unable to get in touch with BCIS.