3

Receive Updates | Enter Email Address | Go

✉

USCIS Launches Pilot Program for Processing Times

U.S. Department of Homeland Security sent this bulletin at 04/03/2018 06:25 PM EDT

Having trouble viewing this email? View it as a Web page.

Citizenship and Immigration Services Ombudsman   **April, 2018**

USCIS Launches Pilot Program for Processing Times

The Office of the Citizenship and Immigration Services Ombudsman is pleased to report that USCIS has recently launched a pilot program to improve how the agency calculates and posts processing times. Processing times, as the term suggests, represent the time USCIS projects it will take to process various applications and petitions for immigration benefits. Processing times vary based on existing workload, incoming workload, resources, the location/office of processing, new policies, etc. USCIS posts processing times regularly on its website to inform sponsors, employers, and applicants how long they should expect to wait and to enable them to plan their lives, work, and travel accordingly.

In launching this pilot program, USCIS is responding to a significant need for better, more accurate information. Over the past several years, the number of applications and petitions filed with USCIS has grown dramatically. Frequently, actual processing times were significantly longer than those posted on the USCIS

website. As a result, individuals and employers – convinced their cases were "lost" – increasingly sought help from USCIS' customer service center and the Ombudsman's Office. Indeed, the Ombudsman's case work has doubled in the past five years and much of that increase has been due to increases in USCIS processing times. Last year (FY 2017), nearly 70 percent of individuals who sought the Ombudsman's help reported delays in processing times.

As our case work grew, the Ombudsman's Office began studying how USCIS calculated and posted processing times. Prior to 2017, USCIS was calculating processing times based on the number of cases pending at a particular office and the monthly completion rate. However, on its website, USCIS was posting a goal for the completion of cases based on that processing time. (e.g., five months for N-400, Application for Naturalization). If a USCIS field office was falling behind on its goal, it would post the date of the application most recently completed. Noting the confusion and the inaccuracy of this system, the Ombudsman's Office made recommendations throughout 2015, 2016, and 2017 on how USCIS could improve the accuracy of processing times, including the use of time ranges based on real-time data.

Similarly, USCIS began studying the problem through a working group established in 2014. In 2017, USCIS simplified its processing time system by no longer differentiating between cases that fell within or outside processing goals. Instead, the agency simply posted the date of the application/petition most recently completed. At the same time, USCIS launched a study and requested feedback from stakeholders on possible ways of presenting processing times including: (1) average time to complete cases; (2) time to complete a specific percentage of cases; and (3) time range to complete most cases.

Marking a significant step forward, USCIS is now piloting a system that combines these approaches. The processing times now consist of a range of dates instead of a single date. For four form-types (I-90, I-485, I-751, and N-400), the first date represents when 50 percent of the cases have been processed. The second date represents the date by which 93 percent of the cases are completed. The pilot program is also capturing data from USCIS databases more frequently, every two weeks instead of every six weeks, to make the processing time ranges even more accurate. For all remaining forms, USCIS will continue to use its old method to calculate processing times, but will post on its website a range in which the upper number generally reflects 130 percent of the estimated processing time.

While this new system is more accurate and helpful to the user, relative newcomers to immigration may react with "sticker shock." The use of more timely data means that viewers will likely see longer processing times than previously reported. Those seeking benefits will therefore need to pay close attention to the dates posted for each application filed and the specific office processing the application.

Furthermore, now that USCIS is calculating processing times using more accurate data, the agency will only accept case inquiries towards the end of the processing range for that case type and location. This will generally reflect the experience of most filers, and will lead to a more efficient allocation of resources to focus on the remaining cases. Those who need to inquire sooner will need to qualify for expedited review.

With respect to case work at the Ombudsman's Office, we will maintain our existing case assistance policies. This includes asking individuals to attempt to resolve their cases directly with USCIS first and wait 60 days past the posted case inquiry date (the end of the estimated time range) before asking the Ombudsman's Office for help. (Note that applicants for employment authorization documents, however, may seek our help as soon as the case inquiry date is reached.) Finally, we will continue to expedite cases consistently with the USCIS expedite criteria. By using these criteria, the Ombudsman's Office, designed as an office of last resort, can focus its limited resources on the most pressing cases.

While more work needs to be done, we congratulate USCIS for its transparency in launching this new pilot program and look forward to working with the agency to educate the public so that we may continue to improve the administration of our immigration laws for the benefit of our nation and all those longing to become part of it. If you want to learn more, the Ombudsman's Office is hosting a teleconference this Thursday at 2 PM EDT on the new processing times. If you are interested in this teleconference, you can RSVP

here .

The Ombudsman hosts a monthly public teleconference series to share information about relevant topics and provide an opportunity to hear feedback from the community about issues related to the delivery of immigration benefits and services.

Stay Connected:
Follow CIS Ombudsman on Facebook

SHARE

Update your subscriptions, modify your password or e-mail address, or stop subscriptions at any time on your Subscriber Preferences Page. You will need to use your e-mail address to log in. If you have questions or problems with the subscription service, please contact subscriberhelp.govdelivery.com.

AILA Doc. No 18040460. (Posted 4/4/18)

This service is provided to you at no charge by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Privacy Policy | GovDelivery is providing this information on behalf of U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and may not use the information for any other purposes.

Powered by

GOVDELIVERY