



Homeland
Security

Follow Up Questions and Answers

The CIS Ombudsman's Webinar Series: USCIS' Online Filing and Customer Service Tools

On March 31, 2021, the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) [Office of the Citizenship and Immigration Services Ombudsman \(CIS Ombudsman\)](#) hosted a public webinar to discuss U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' (USCIS) online filing and customer service tools.

Below is the list of inquiries received from stakeholders during this webinar and - the responses provided by USCIS:

Q1. Since the I-765 can be filed online, does this mean a student can submit the form while they are outside the U.S.? The paper I-765 instructions states it needs to be mailed in the U.S. which means Designated School Officials (DSOs) have advised students to return to the U.S. to apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT). Does this change things with e-filing?

A1. The current filing instructions state: "Certain foreign nationals who are in the United States may file Form I-765." Therefore, students need to be in the U.S. to file Form I-765 whether filing by paper or online.

Q2. If a student files an online I-765 application, how does he/she submit a withdrawal letter – through their online account or mail a withdrawal letter to the service center?

A2. Communications, including a withdrawal letter, for an application filed online should be submitted through the online account.

Q3. Form I-539 is available for filing online, but there is no opportunity for counsel to assist the applicant. What is being done to recognize the representation of applications by counsel?

A3. USCIS is working with stakeholders to address this issue, but due to ongoing litigation, we are unable to provide details at this time. We hope to have additional details to share in the near future.

Q4. When an individual e-files an application, are Receipt Notices sent via mail only, available in myUSCIS account only, or both? Or does it depend on the Form number?

A4. When an individual submits an application online, we mail a paper receipt notice to the applicant, and his or her representative, if the applicant has one.

For Form I-539 filed online, the entire process is conducted electronically using the online account. However, Form I-539 approval notices are sent by mail and to the online account.

Q5. Most immigration attorneys use one of the several case management systems to gather information, track cases and prepare forms and applications. Currently USCIS systems do not permit communication with the commercial systems, and therefore require attorneys to data enter the form information a second time. This leads to the increase in errors and at best, is a waste of time. What plans does USCIS have to work with the commercial vendors to provide communication between the case management software and USCIS' on-line filing systems?

A5. We are aware of the legal community's use of third-party software to manage their clients' casework, evidence, etc. At this time, we do not have any immediate plans for commercial case management software to connect with the USCIS online account.

Q6. How are we supposed to reach out to the local USCIS office about VAWA-related cases when they are transferred from VT? The USCIS Customer Service phone line cannot give any information about VAWA-related cases.

A6. Applicants and recipients of immigration relief under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA self-petitions) and the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Prevention Act of 2000 (T and U nonimmigrant status for victims of trafficking and other serious crimes) are entitled to certain privacy and confidentiality protections under 8 U.S.C. 1367. USCIS must ensure that information related to protected individuals is disclosed only to authorized parties.

Represented petitioners may send email inquiries to:

- For U nonimmigrant petitions and U adjustment of status applications located at the Nebraska Service Center: nsc.i-918inquiries@uscis.dhs.gov
- For T nonimmigrant and T adjustment of status applications, U nonimmigrant petitions and U adjustment of status applications at the Vermont Service Center: HotlineFollowupI918I914.vsc@uscis.dhs.gov
- For all VAWA petitions: HotlineFollowUpI360.vsc@uscis.dhs.gov

Unrepresented petitioners may send written inquiries to:

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Vermont Service Center
ATTN: Humanitarian Division
75 Lower Welden St.
St. Albans, VT 05479-0001

For U Nonimmigrant Petitions and U Adjustment of Status Applications located at the Nebraska Service Center:
USCIS Nebraska Service Center
Attn: I-918
PO Box 87918
Lincoln, NE 68501-7918

If the self-petitioner, applicant, or representative does call the USCIS Contact Center, the Contact Center will direct the individual to the appropriate inquiry mechanism listed above. In certain scenarios, the Contact Center might schedule the caller to appear at a field office to verify the individual's identity so that an inquiry or service request can then be submitted.

Law enforcement agencies may inquire using this email address:
LawEnforcement_UTVAWA.vsc@uscis.dhs.gov

Q7. We have two myUSCIS online accounts with two different e-mails. We want to permanently cancel one (which was never used, as it was erroneously created as an individual account instead of a legal representative account). How do we cancel it? Does an attorney need an online account for EACH client? Or just one account that he will be able to link all clients to?

A7. An attorney can use one online account for all clients. At this time, online accounts cannot be cancelled.

Q8. I am an attorney, and I have a myUSCIS account. I have not been able to link paper-filed applications that I filed for my clients with my account. The USCIS Account Access notice requires that I open a new account, but uscis.gov only allows one account per attorney. How do I link my client's paper-filed applications with my account? The question is about applications with receipt numbers starting with IOE.

A8. If a representative has previously submitted paper applications, each filing can be linked to the representative's online account only if all associated Form G-28s provide identical information for the representative of record. The automated linking feature uses algorithms that rely on identical matches for the data fields. The initial representative account is created using the data provided on the first submitted paper Form G-28. When additional paper-filed cases are received, the associated Form G-28 must exactly match (including letter case, spaces and punctuation) in order for a link to the existing account to occur. When mismatches in Form G-28 data exist, new USCIS Account Access Notices are issued and links to previous and newly submitted cases cannot occur in one account online.

Representatives who wish to access all client cases in a single online account need to submit a Form G-28 with data that matches all fields in the original account for each case.

Q9. Will the USCIS accounts be available in other languages? In Spanish for example?

A9. At this time, we do not have plans to make the account available in other languages.

Q10. As an DOJ accredited representative, how can we add our paper filed cases under our existing USCIS account?

A10. If you previously filed certain applications, petitions, or requests on a paper form using a USCIS lockbox facility, you may have received a USCIS Online Account Access Notice issuing you a USCIS Online Account Number. You can find this number at the top of the notice. (We previously called this the USCIS ELIS Number.)

When you create your USCIS online account, enter your online access code located on the same notice to link your USCIS account and access your paper-filed cases (if applicable).

Q11. My business is licensed in the state of Georgia as an immigration assistance provider entity. I have to take a bond every year for liability. Yet I am unable to have a USCIS account to file online for my clients. Instead I have to use a different email address each time. I am running out of email addresses for filing forms.

A11. USCIS offers three types of accounts:

- Applicant account – for applicants, petitioners, and requestors
- Representative account – for attorneys and accredited representatives
- Registrant account – for H-1B registrants

If you are not an attorney or an accredited representative recognized by the U.S. Department of Justice, you are not able to create a representative account or file benefit requests on behalf of others. The applicant or registrant will need to set up their own applicant account.

Q12. If an applicant calls to cancel an interview due to COVID-19 reasons, do they need to call a second time for another appointment?

A12. Customers should follow the reschedule or cancellation instructions listed on the interview notice.

Q13. Since the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) has been used for the Contact Center, as an accredited rep, I've not been able to get through to a person for assistance. No combination of words works to get past the suggested online information (of which I am already aware of but wasn't able to help in a particular situation). The most common path is for the IVR to offer to either text or email me the link and when I say, "Neither, I need a

customer service representative" nor some such iteration, the voice says she is unable to help me further and hangs up. I've spent a number of hours on behalf of different clients in trying to speak with a person, to no avail. Again, I've not been able to get any person to speak to. A problem that arises from this, other than the obvious, is that we are to try to attend to a situation with the Contact Center first before contacting the CIS Ombudsman's Office.

A13. The IVR is designed to provide accurate answers to most inquiries using self-service options. For those who may require additional assistance, the IVR has an option for individuals to request live assistance. Call volume can be heavy so you may need to try calling the Contact Center at different times.

Q14. USCIS in February issued a guidance, allowing some F-1 students to refile I-765 because of the long delay caused by USCIS lockbox. This guidance specifies that only F-1 students who file I-765 within 30 days of the DSO's recommendation of OPT can refile. Question: If a student didn't submit I-765 within the 30-day requirement, but lost his eligibility to refile because the denial notice was issued after 60-day grace period due to the long delay by USCIS lockbox, can USCIS be flexible and also allow students in this situation to refile?

A14. USCIS understands that there are several possible situations in which intake delays may have adversely impacted applicants. USCIS evaluates each applicant's circumstances and considers the timing of relevant events and actions in considering whether an application can be considered under currently available flexibilities.

In the scenario above, the applicant failed to meet the regulatory requirement of timely filing his or her Form I-765 within 30 days of the date the DSO entered the OPT recommendation into SEVIS. As a result, he falls outside the scope of the OPT flexibilities published to the USCIS website on February 26.

Q15. How can a person find out what office location a petition is being processed through?

A15. Applicants can find the office location on the lower left corner of their receipt notice. Please visit this webpage for help finding key pieces of information on a receipt notice: <https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/more-info>.

If the "USCIS Office" shown on a receipt notice is the National Benefits Center (NBC) and the applicant has filed an employment-based or family-based Form I-485, Form N-400, or Form N-600, they should check processing times for their local field office. They can find their local field office by using our Field Office locator: <https://www.uscis.gov/about-us/find-a-uscis-office/field-offices>.

Q16. If the case processing time methodology is based on completion, does it include cases with RFEs? If so, it seems unfair to peg the case inquiry date to the upper level of the range, as RFEs will add at least several months to case processing time.

A16. The processing times based on completions include cases with Requests for Evidence (RFEs). Removing cases with RFEs may not have a significant impact at the 93rd percentile. Those cases are likely to be experiencing delays in excess of the timeframe to send/respond to an RFE (less than 90 days). There may be some instances where carving out RFEs would result in a shorter window of time within which an individual or attorney of record can submit an inquiry on the status of an application or petition. Unfortunately, we must also take into account our limited resources and the volume of inquiries we can effectively manage.

Q17. How often is the processing time webpage updated?

A17. The processing times are generally updated once per month.