

The following recommendation was issued as part of the CIS Ombudsman 2004 Annual Report to Congress. A copy of this report may be obtained from the CIS Ombudsman Website at <http://www.dhs.gov/cisombudsman>.

STREAMLINING FAMILY-BASED IMMIGRANT PROCESSING

At present, immediate relatives¹ of U.S. Citizens, applying for lawful permanent residence evidenced by a Green Card² are subjected to extensive processing times, despite no statutory limitation being imposed upon individuals immigrating under this classification. Although corresponding processing times vary across the country, in certain USCIS offices, processing times have stretched in excess of two years. Additionally, while an immediate relative application package³ for lawful permanent residence is pending, an applicant is eligible to apply for interim benefits⁴. These interim benefits must be renewed on an annual basis. Applicants for interim benefits are required by law to pay additional filing fees with each subsequent application. These interim benefit filings further perpetuate the already sizeable processing backlog.

With this in mind the Ombudsman recommended to USCIS a one-step, front-end adjudication process whereby applicants would appear at a USCIS local office to file applications packages for permanent residence and be interviewed on the same day. Qualified applicants would be issued a Green Card within 90 days. In order to ensure equitable treatment, pending applicants would be given the opportunity to assume their place in this new line by resubmitting a duplicate of their original application including all required supporting documentation without fee when presenting the original receipt.

This recommended workflow is intended to increase efficiencies as the need for interim benefits and recurring security checks are mitigated, thereby allowing appropriate redirection of now-available resources towards core backlog reduction efforts. Moreover, customers are spared the hassles of multiple visits to USCIS facilities and reap the satisfaction of immediate results. National security and legal immigration integrity are enhanced since the bona fides of an application are established at the outset, thereby discouraging frivolous filings and preventing ineligible individuals from receiving any immigration benefits. In addition, duplicative efforts and labor hours are reduced, as applications are processed in a more streamlined manner.

In response to this recommendation, USCIS launched a pilot project at its Dallas, Texas district office. This pilot project embodies the major elements of the Ombudsman's recommendation and incorporates additional positive efficiencies and customer focused processes not originally proposed. The Ombudsman commends USCIS for these customer-focused additions to the one-step processing. Known as the Rapid Adjustment Pilot Program, this customer service initiative aims to complete Green Card processing within 90 days of filing, completely eliminating the

¹ INA Section 201(b)(2)(A)(i) defines "immediate relatives" as the children, spouses, and parents of citizens of the United States.

² Permanent Resident Card (Form I-551).

³ Application to Register Permanent Residence or Adjust Status (Form I-485), Petition for Alien Relative (Form I-130) and other required documentation.

⁴ See supra (2).

need for repeated adjudication of interim benefits and the associated costs for qualified applicants who complete the process within the given timeframe.

In addition to the implementation of the pilot program, USCIS has also introduced INFOPASS, a new internet-based appointment scheduling system in Dallas. This system, originally introduced at the USCIS Miami, Florida district office, is now being employed at a number of USCIS locations. INFOPASS allows applicants to schedule appointments through the local USCIS internet web site, resulting in a more efficient and respectful way to manage crowds and coordinate USCIS work schedules.

The Ombudsman recently forwarded a recommendation to USCIS to rapidly expand on the innovative Dallas pilot program. It is demonstrating itself as a viable means for achieving greater operational efficiency with existing assets. It also eliminates the need for processing interim benefits, thus reducing potential security risks due to the fraud potential and the insecure nature of the interim benefits documents issued by USCIS. With the reduction of interim benefits applications and recurring security checks, USCIS personnel and other resources can be reallocated to focus on core backlog reduction efforts.