

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>.

REENGINEERING “GREEN CARD” REPLACEMENT PROCESSING

Green Card replacement applications¹ are the fourth most prevalent type of filings processed by USCIS, comprising approximately ten percent (10%) of all applications and petitions received by USCIS. Replacement applications must be filed when a Green Card has been damaged, lost or upon expiration (cards are valid for ten years). In order to replace an existing Green Card, an individual is subjected to lengthy processing times ranging anywhere from approximately ten to twelve months. This delay in processing poses severe hardship on individuals who are required by law to present their Green Card for employment, travel and other similar interactions.

The processes employed by USCIS for Green Card replacement are inherently inefficient, requiring personnel to perform duplicative functions and recurring security checks. Under current operations, customers must appear at one of two types of USCIS facilities (depending upon the nature of the Green Card replacement) where a government representative verifies the customer's identity and immigration status, and also performs requisite security checks. The application is then forwarded to yet another USCIS facility where the information is data-entered and recurring security checks are performed while the application remains pending, awaiting final decision.

Since an application for Green Card replacement merely serves to replace evidence of status already granted, the Ombudsman recommended to USCIS a one-step, front-end process whereby applicants would appear at a USCIS local office where identity would be verified, status confirmed, security checks performed, and a preliminary decision rendered. Consequently, the replacement Green Card would be fabricated and issued within 90 days for qualified applicants who complete the process within the given timeframe.

This recommended process is anticipated to create efficiencies by minimizing duplicative efforts at multiple USCIS facilities and enabling a more efficient distribution of resources to focus on core backlog reduction efforts. Moreover, national security and legal immigration integrity are enhanced since the need to issue temporary evidence of lawful permanent residence, which historically has not been particularly fraud resistant, can be minimized. Additionally, individuals find great satisfaction in timely, customer-friendly processing.

Upon review of this recommendation, USCIS initiated a pilot program at the Los Angeles, California district office to reengineer and automate its current operational procedures in processing applications for Green Card replacement. The program is being monitored by the Ombudsman to determine if the problems that spawned the Ombudsman's recommendation are resolved by the USCIS response.

¹ Application to Replace Permanent Card (Form I-90).