



## How to Make Your Communication with the USCIS Contact Center More Effective

The Office of the Citizenship and Immigration Services Ombudsman (CIS Ombudsman) is providing this information to assist customers in navigating recent changes to [USCIS Contact Center](#) processes. The USCIS Contact Center has made changes to reduce reliance on telephonic live assistance while promoting the use of online self-help tools and digital inquiry channels. We understand this is the result of financial limitations and resource constraints that make it impossible for USCIS to offer live assistance to every customer in the face of increased inquiry volumes.

### **When does it make sense to reach out to the USCIS Contact Center?**

- ✓ When you need to reschedule a biometrics appointment or interview in advance of the appointment or interview date;
- ✓ For emergencies, such as emergency advance parole for travel or proof of lawful permanent resident status (such as an Alien Documentation, Identification and Telecommunications (ADIT) stamp in your passport);
- ✓ To request an expedite of your case if any of the USCIS [expedite criteria](#) apply; and/or
- ✓ For inquiries related to cases outside normal processing time, or other inquiries that truly require live assistance.

### **Notes:**

- ✓ Check your [case status](#) frequently and wait until your case is outside normal processing time per USCIS' [processing times page](#) by selecting the form type and office location before reaching out to the USCIS Contact Center.
- ✓ Processing times vary from office to office.
- ✓ USCIS adjudicates applications and petitions on a case-by-case basis. Each case is unique, and some cases may take longer to adjudicate. This does not mean that there is a problem with your case.

### ***I'm going through the menu options on the USCIS Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system menu of options, but not getting to live assistance. What should I do now?***

- ✓ Use the agency's [online tools](#) when you can and request live assistance for when it is truly needed (scheduling an in-person appointment for an ADIT stamp, emergency parole, etc.), which helps USCIS manage its limited resources.

- ✓ USCIS is limiting live assistance through the USCIS Contact Center to better assist those who require live assistance. In those instances where self-service is available, the IVR will not present an option for a caller to reach live service.
- ✓ The USCIS Contact Center wait times have increased due to a number of reasons, including decreased staffing levels, something USCIS and the contract vendor are actively working to address.
- ✓ Be strategic when calling the USCIS Contact Center. Call volume is heaviest on Mondays and tends to get lighter throughout the week.

**Help – the USCIS IVR menu options led me to a dead end.**

- ✓ [Emma](#), the online virtual assistant on the USCIS website, has a “Live Chat” feature that enables you to reach live assistance Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern Time in certain instances if Emma cannot answer the question.
  - You can also submit a case inquiry or service request using [e-Request](#).
  - If you filed a form online through myUSCIS, you have access to all of the account features (such as a secure inbox and the ability to view notices, respond to RFEs, check case status, etc.) and can send a secure message from within your [USCIS online account](#). If you did not file your case online but have a receipt number that begins with “IOE,” you have access to all account features AFTER you (1) create your online account AND (2) link your paper filing to your myUSCIS account using a unique Online Access Code (OAC) that USCIS provides via mail. You can then send secure messages to USCIS.

**What else can I do in my online account to bypass the USCIS Contact Center?**

- ✓ If you filed Form N-400, *Application for Naturalization*, or Form I-90, *Application to Replace Permanent Resident Card (Green Card)* online or linked a paper-filed case to your account, you have access to all of the account features outlined above (such as a secure inbox and the ability to view notices, respond to RFEs, check case status, etc.). Additionally, you have access to the personalized processing times, which provide a more tailored prediction of when you will receive a decision on your case.

**How can I make sure I get my call returned?**

- ✓ USCIS makes two attempts to contact customers. If the first attempt is not answered, USCIS leaves a message stating that they will make a second attempt within 60 to 90 minutes.
- ✓ If USCIS is unable to reach the individual after the second attempt, the USCIS Contact Center will send an email stating that the agency tried to reach them and instructs them to call back or use other tools.

**Why won't USCIS talk to my paralegal?**

- ✓ USCIS can only provide case information to legal representatives with a Form G-28, *Notice of Entry of Appearance as Attorney or Accredited Representative*, on file in the case.

- ✓ Allow time for a Form G-28 change, if one is needed, to catch up to the file. This administrative task is taking longer than it has in the past.
- ✓ The agency is reviewing current policy to determine whether employees of the same law firm as the legal representative can communicate with the USCIS Contact Center without having to execute a separate Form G-28.

#### ***How can I make sure I don't miss a return call?***

- ✓ Provide your cell phone number *and* your office number. The USCIS Contact Center will try more than one contact number.
- ✓ USCIS is working on a text-ahead solution that will let an applicant or representative know approximately when to expect a call, but it is not likely to be adopted for some time.
- ✓ USCIS tries to return calls during normal business hours, but calls are assigned on a first-in/first-out basis (across the country) to keep service timely. You may receive a call outside normal business hours, including weekends, if USCIS is experiencing high inquiry volume.

#### ***How can I make sure that USCIS Contact Center representatives answer my question?***

- ✓ Tier 1 of the USCIS Contact Center, the first level of live telephonic assistance or "Live Chat," is staffed by trained contractors who use knowledge articles to answer questions, and USCIS frequently updates these articles as needed. Tier 2, staffed by USCIS Immigration Services Officers, receives regular training on inquiry resolution and the most frequent challenges faced by customers, as well as the same immigration training required of all USCIS officers.
- ✓ USCIS has a quality assurance team that reviews interactions between customers and the USCIS Contact Center. Whenever they identify instances where the USCIS Contact Center did not correctly answer the customer's question, the agency will enhance its knowledge articles, training, and quality assurance practices.
- ✓ USCIS and the CIS Ombudsman are also working together to identify instances where the USCIS Contact Center did not correctly answer the customer's question through close monitoring of inquiries submitted to the CIS Ombudsman.

#### ***What constitutes an emergency?***

- ✓ The USCIS Contact Center decides whether there is an emergency (such as for advance parole). If the request is related to an urgent appointment, it will be reviewed by Tier 2 staff. Getting an appointment, however, is up to the field office where the appointment is sought, not the USCIS Contact Center. USCIS field offices strive to accommodate the majority of appointments within two weeks.
- ✓ USCIS responds to urgent inquiries either by email or a return call within 24-72 hours. USCIS aims to respond to non-urgent inquiries within 30 business days.
- ✓ Tier 1 representatives tell callers whether their issue falls into the urgent or non-urgent category. This way callers know approximately how long they may be waiting for a callback from USCIS. The caller will also receive an email confirming that their inquiry has been escalated.

***I need to expedite my case. How do I ensure that my request will be considered?***

- ✓ If the request is related to an urgent appointment, it will be reviewed by Tier 2 staff.
- ✓ If the request relates to a possible expedite of a pending application or petition, that decision is made by the field office or service center that has the case, and the USCIS Contact Center is only responsible for sending the request to the field office/service center processing the case.
- ✓ A decision will be made based on current USCIS [expedite criteria](#).

***I need an interpreter.***

- ✓ All USCIS Contact Center services are offered in English and Spanish, and the wait times are the same for both languages.
- ✓ Apart from responding to inquiries in Spanish, the USCIS Contact Center does not provide an interpreter.
- ✓ Callers can use their own interpreter. Individuals will need to answer some verification questions before USCIS can share information about a case.

***I need a biometrics appointment. My application or petition cannot be finished without it.***

- ✓ Biometrics appointments are scheduled automatically. Because of pandemic-related protocols, USCIS has continued to experience delays in scheduling and rescheduling these appointments.
- ✓ [Application Support Centers](#) (ASCs) are now fully operational and some have extended their hours. It is, however, taking 90 days or longer in some locations to schedule biometrics appointments.
- ✓ USCIS is reusing biometrics where appropriate, but this is dependent upon certain specific characteristics matching, and that matching cannot be determined until after the application or petition is filed.
- ✓ Please note that the USCIS Contact Center *cannot schedule a biometrics appointment, only reschedule an appointment* that an applicant cannot attend.

***I need to reschedule an appointment or interview.***

- ✓ Emma, [e-Request](#), and other online tools are available 24/7 to applicants, including those needing to reschedule an appointment or interview. Customers and representatives can also call the USCIS Contact Center at any time.
- ✓ In many situations, Emma will route to a live agent during business hours if it cannot assist.
- ✓ Requests to reschedule an ASC appointment in advance of the appointment date are among the categories of calls routed to live assistance through the IVR or “Live Chat” through Emma.
- ✓ Rescheduling requests for interviews or oaths are sent to field offices as service requests. The field office must then make the decision.
- ✓ There is no guarantee that the field office will reschedule the interview, and if you do not receive a response, you should plan to attend the interview. Please note, however, that individuals with COVID-19 or who are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, should not attend an interview under any circumstances and should refer to the COVID-19 guidance on the USCIS website.