



**Homeland  
Security**

# Engagement Readout

## **The CIS Ombudsman's Webinar Series: USCIS and CIS Ombudsman Joint Engagements on USCIS' Current State of Operations**

On November 19, 2020, the Department of Homeland Security's Office of the Citizenship and Immigration Services Ombudsman (CIS Ombudsman) hosted the second of two webinar sessions to discuss U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' (USCIS) current state of operations given its fiscal challenges and the COVID-19 pandemic. Subject matter experts (SMEs) from USCIS joined the engagement.

During this second session, Citizenship and Immigration Services Ombudsman Michael Dougherty provided welcoming remarks and Deputy Ombudsman Nathan Stiefel facilitated a dialogue with USCIS SMEs. The guest speakers relayed information and answered questions about USCIS' measures in place to address in-person activities (such as InfoMod, biometrics, and adjudication interviews), as well as extensions on responses to deadlines related to Requests for Evidence or Notices. For example, USCIS SMEs stated that the agency's Application Support Centers (ASCs) are currently scheduling biometrics appointments at nearly 65% of pre-COVID-19 capacity. The agency is presently scheduling approximately 10,400 biometrics appointments per day and there are roughly 1.3 million applications awaiting biometrics. COVID-19 mitigation efforts have increased the processing time for each applicant, and this has resulted in a backlog at the ASCs. USCIS is reusing biometrics to the extent possible while adhering to all necessary identity verification requirements. If an applicant receives a biometrics appointment notice that is geographically distant from their physical address, USCIS recommends they call the [USCIS Contact Center](#) at 800-375-5283 to request rescheduling at a different ASC location.

USCIS SMEs confirmed that the agency is working to resume interviews as quickly and safely as possible. Prioritization of interviews may vary by field office depending on available workloads. The agency confirmed there are no COVID-19 accommodations that extend the validity period of a required medical examination for rescheduled interviews that result in medical examination results expiring. For any Form I-693, Report of Medical Examination and Vaccination Record, submitted to USCIS on or after November 1, 2018, the civil surgeon must sign Form I-693 no more than 60 days prior to the submission of the underlying immigration benefit application for which Form I-693 is required. The Form I-693 will remain valid for a two-year period following the date the civil surgeon signed the form. The applicant is required to submit an updated Form I-693 when the two-year period expires or if his or her medical condition changes, which may include updates to vaccinations. It was noted that this could pose a new challenge due to the impact of COVID-19.

A total of 914 stakeholders joined this webinar [attorneys/legal representatives – 51%, government workers – 13%, employers – 8%, petitioners/applicants – 6.5%, advocacy groups – 2.5% and others – 19%]. Participants submitted 156 written questions, several of which CIS Ombudsman Chief of Policy Elissa McGovern posed to USCIS SMEs during the webinar. Topics such as receipt notice delays, prioritization of interviews and cases at field offices, and procedures to reschedule interviews and biometrics appointments were discussed. Below is a sample of the questions received:

- How many appointments were previously de-scheduled due to temporary office closures?
- What criteria is used to determine eligibility for the reuse of previously submitted biometrics?
- How far in advance can InfoMod and biometrics appointments be scheduled?
- Are there any USCIS field offices that are unable to schedule InfoMod appointments right now?
- Does USCIS foresee an increase in interview waivers due to COVID-19 and related operational challenges?
- What should applicants expect when they are participating in a naturalization ceremony at a USCIS facility?
- What current notices are eligible for extended response times?
- With COVID-19 case numbers increasing, what are USCIS' benchmarks for closing offices and cancelling in-person appointments?

A full list of inquiries will be shared with USCIS to give the agency an opportunity to address the public's concerns.

**Speakers:**

- Michael Dougherty, Ombudsman
- Nathan Stiefel, Deputy Ombudsman
- Elissa McGovern, Chief of Policy at the Ombudsman's Office
- Bertha Anderson, Chief of Public Engagement at the Ombudsman's Office
- Claudia Young, Assistant Associate Director, Field Operations Directorate (FOD) at USCIS
- Patricia Kemling, Chief of the Operations Support Branch, FOD at USCIS
- James Weidemann, Acting Chief of the Citizenship Branch, FOD at USCIS
- Mary Herrmann, Chief of the Public Services Division, External Affairs Directorate at USCIS
- Brian Broderick, Deputy Chief of the Identity and Information Management Division, Immigration Records and Identity Services Directorate at USCIS