



**Homeland
Security**

Engagement Readout

The CIS Ombudsman's Webinar Series: The USCIS Contact Center

On April 14, 2021, the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) [Office of the Citizenship and Immigration Services Ombudsman \(CIS Ombudsman\)](#) hosted a webinar about the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Contact Center.

During this webinar, CIS Ombudsman staff engaged in a conversation with USCIS subject matter experts (SMEs) to provide an overview of how the USCIS Contact Center trains its Tier 1 representatives, responds to calls to its customer service phone line (800-375-5283), and the range of publicly available self-service options—such as Emma (the USCIS virtual assistant), live chat, e-Request, and secure and non-secure electronic messaging. USCIS SMEs elaborated on the challenges the USCIS Contact Center has been facing due to the agency's hiring freeze and reduction in contract services, coupled with normal attrition and how it is addressing these issues. USCIS shared that in Fiscal Year 2020, the agency received 11 million calls to its customer service phone line. To more effectively balance efficiency and customer service, as well as to ensure its resources were effectively helping those most in need of live assistance, USCIS implemented a new interactive voice response system. In May 2020, USCIS replaced its telephone menu options with an Intelligent Assistant interactive telephone system to promote self-service and decrease the number of callers obtaining live assistance. In addition, USCIS will soon make available—without requiring an appointment—kiosks at field offices for paying Executive Office for Immigration Review fees.

USCIS does not have plans to reintroduce the ability to self-schedule appointments with local offices (InfoPass). All requests will continue to be funneled through the USCIS Contact Center.

The agency encourages applicants, petitioners, and legal representatives to [sign up for a free USCIS online account, also known as myUSCIS](#). Through myUSCIS, customers can view case status updates and notices, submit documents, respond to a request for evidence, see when an interview may be scheduled, and engage in secure communication with USCIS. Applicants who filed a paper form **and** have an IOE receipt number can add the paper-filed case to their myUSCIS account to access these functionalities. Paper-filed applications that do not have an IOE receipt number can be added to the myUSCIS account, but only the “tracking case status” feature is currently available.

A total of 828 stakeholders joined this webinar. Forty-three percent of attendees were attorneys or legal representatives; 19% identified as government employees; 8% were employers; 7% were petitioners or applicants; 2% represented advocacy groups; and 21% identified as other. Participants submitted 163 written questions and the speakers answered as many as they could during the engagement. Below is a sample of the questions received:

- Can a USCIS Contact Center Immigration Services Officer schedule an applicant for a biometrics appointment (if over 90 days)?
- Would USCIS consider a dedicated phone line for attorneys or representatives with G-28s on file?
- How does the agency plan to support customers with limited English proficiency who call the USCIS Contact Center?
- Does the agency test USCIS Contact Center operations and efficiency by placing cold calls, queries, and escalation requests?
- How can VAWA, U, and T visa applicants receive updates about their cases if Tier 1 and 2 Contact Center representatives are unable to provide information and the Vermont Service Center does not reply to mailed requests?
- Does USCIS take into consideration different time zones for callbacks? How is the agency planning to address the current callback issues?

The CIS Ombudsman will share a full list of inquiries with USCIS to give the agency an opportunity to address the public's concerns. Additionally, the CIS Ombudsman will post the engagement's presentation on its website.

Speakers

Nathan Stiefel, Deputy Ombudsman at the CIS Ombudsman's Office, DHS

Bertha Anderson, Chief of Public Engagement at the CIS Ombudsman's Office, DHS

Fatimah Mateen, Senior Advisor at the CIS Ombudsman's Office, DHS

Carrie Selby, Acting Associate Director, External Affairs Directorate, USCIS

Bret Gregg, Deputy Chief, Public Services Division, Office of Citizenship and Applicant Information Services, USCIS