



Homeland Security

November 20, 2014

MEMORANDUM FOR: León Rodríguez
Director
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

FROM: Jeh Charles Johnson
Secretary

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeh Charles Johnson".

SUBJECT: **Policies to Promote and Increase Access to U.S. Citizenship**

Deciding to become a U.S. citizen is an important decision in an immigrant's life and a significant milestone in his or her journey toward full membership in our society. By deciding to naturalize, immigrants demonstrate their permanent commitment to the United States and their desire to fully integrate into the fabric of American society.

There are more than 8 million lawful permanent residents in the United States who are eligible to become citizens, but who have not yet sought to do so. The President believes U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) should explore options to promote and increase access to naturalization and to consider innovative ways to address barriers that may impede such access, including for those who lack resources to pay application fees. Accordingly, I am directing USCIS to take the steps described below.

A. Implementing Credit Card Processing

The President is committed to addressing barriers to naturalization that filing fees may impose on applicants while ensuring the fiscal stability of USCIS in light of its dependence on fee-generated income. The cost of naturalization is currently \$680, comprised of the \$595 naturalization fee and the \$85 biometrics fee. Many lawful permanent residents in the United States who are eligible for citizenship may find it more convenient to pay the cost of naturalization using their credit cards, yet currently there is no vehicle available to them to pay in that manner.

I direct USCIS to begin accepting credit cards as a payment option for the naturalization fee, which would allow applicants to pay the cost of the application while paying the relevant credit-issuing financial institution according to its terms. Presently,

USCIS accepts the naturalization fee by either money order or check. To implement this option, USCIS should rely on the electronic payment portal on the Department of the Treasury's Pay.gov website. USCIS should begin accepting credit cards for the payment of the naturalization fee as soon as practicable and no later than the end of 2015.

B. Conducting a Fee Study to Explore a Partial Fee Waiver Program

USCIS now provides a waiver of the \$680 cost of naturalization if the applicant's income is no greater than 150% of the federal poverty level, the applicant is receiving a means-tested public benefit, or the applicant demonstrates other special financial circumstances justifying waiver for inability to pay. The existing waiver based on income is an all-or-nothing mechanism that is not available to persons whose income is above 150% of the federal poverty level.

I have asked USCIS to consider a partial waiver (*e.g.*, 50%) in the case of applicants whose income is more than 150% and no greater than 200% of the federal poverty level, or a scaled adjustment to the fee based on a range of income levels. In response, you have informed me that you cannot at this time recommend a partial fee waiver given the uncertain financial risk associated with it for an agency that is dependent on fee-generated income. In light of that, I direct that USCIS include the feasibility of such a partial fee waiver proposal as part of the next biennial fee study. We will reconsider a partial fee waiver following that study.

C. Expanding Public Awareness/Promotion Media Campaigns

Finally, building on the ongoing efforts of the USCIS Office of Citizenship to engage and support partners to welcome immigrants, promote English language learning, increase education on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, and encourage U.S. citizenship, I hereby direct that USCIS expand citizenship public awareness by launching a comprehensive media campaign targeting major media markets in California, New York, Texas, Florida, New Jersey, Illinois, Massachusetts, Virginia, Washington, and Arizona. These 10 states are home to 75% of the overall lawful permanent resident population. To this end, USCIS should collaborate with state and local governments and foreign embassies in the United States to provide information on U.S. citizenship and the naturalization process.