



UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

May 22, 2026

The Honorable Markwayne Mullin
Secretary of Homeland Security
Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue, S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20528

The Honorable Joseph B. Edlow
Director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
5900 Capital Gateway Dr,
Camp Springs, MD 20746

Dear Secretary Mullin and Director Edlow,

We write to express serious concern regarding the rapidly expanding backlog of applications pending before U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and the troubling questions that this backlog raises regarding USCIS's failure to conduct its core function. As a result, millions of individuals who are trying to follow the law are stuck in administrative limbo and, in some cases, at risk of deportation through no fault of their own.

USCIS has more financial resources than in previous years, yet performance continues to deteriorate.¹ As you know, USCIS is a fee-funded agency, with applicants required to pay filing fees that are intended to cover the full cost of processing applications. Recent legislative changes, including the 2025 megabill H.R. 1, raised those fees for many applicants, creating additional financial barriers for individuals attempting to pursue legal immigration pathways.² At the same time, Congress has provided supplemental funding specifically intended to reduce the backlog and improve processing capacity.³ USCIS is therefore operating with increased fee

¹ [USCIS, Fiscal Year 2024 Report to Congress Immigration Examinations Fee Account](https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/data/DHS%20SIGNED%20REPORT_%20USCIS%20IEFA%20FY2024%20Statement%20of%20Financial%20Condition.pdf), https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/data/DHS%20SIGNED%20REPORT_%20USCIS%20IEFA%20FY2024%20Statement%20of%20Financial%20Condition.pdf

² National Immigration Justice Center, *Trump and Congress's Punishing New Immigration Fees*, <https://immigrantjustice.org/research/explainer-trump-and-congresss-punishing-new-immigration-fees/>

³ National Immigration Forum, *Annual Funding From Congress Needed to Tackle USCIS Backlogs*, <https://forumtogether.org/article/annual-funding-from-congress-needed-to-tackle-uscis-backlogs/>

revenue and additional taxpayer support, both directed at the same goal: processing applications more efficiently.

Recent reporting also indicates that the federal government has collected over \$1 billion in immigration fees for applications that were subsequently not processed.⁴ This appears to stem from policy changes, including a memorandum from Director Edlow expanding a processing and adjudication freeze for 40 countries, that has led USCIS to continue to collect fees from impacted individuals without adjudicating benefits.⁵ Some individuals from the impacted countries paid up to \$3,000 for “premium processing” which should have resulted in receiving a decision in a matter of weeks.⁶ Instead, they have been left in administrative limbo while USCIS pockets the fee.

Notwithstanding this increase in funds, USCIS’s resources appear to have been directed away from the agency’s core mission of adjudicating immigration benefits, including to other priorities such as assisting ICE in enforcement activities and operations.⁷ The expansion of USCIS’s law enforcement authorities and the addition of USCIS 1811 classified officers is a departure from the purpose for which the agency was created as outlined in the Homeland Security Act: to focus exclusively on the administration of benefit applications.⁸ We find that this foray into immigration enforcement is a clear example of mission creep and a misuse of the skills and resources of the agency.

Against that backdrop, the growth of the backlog to unprecedented levels is especially disturbing. While USCIS has long faced processing challenges, the scale and pace of this increase marks a clear and troubling departure from prior trends and raises significant questions about current agency operations, resource allocation, and policy decisions. Recent analysis of data from USCIS shows that nearly 12 million applications for immigration services are currently awaiting a decision.⁹ This is a significant change from the prior year with the total number of pending applications jumping by nearly 2 million in 2025 alone.¹⁰ This sharp increase raises serious concerns about what factors may be preventing USCIS from being able to effectively carry out its core mission of administering immigration benefits.

4 Common Dreams, *Trump State Dept. Accused of ‘Largest Fee Fraud in History’ of US Immigration System*, <https://www.commondreams.org/news/immigration-fee-fraud-state-dept>

5 CATO Institute, *Government Defrauds Legal Immigrants and US Sponsors Who Paid \$1 Billion Fees*, <https://www.cato.org/blog/banned-immigrants-us-sponsors-paid-over-1-billion-fees-defrauded-government>

6 NPR, *Immigrants from travel ban countries wait in limbo in U.S.*, <https://www.npr.org/2026/04/28/nx-s1-5775869/trump-travel-ban-pause-limbo-professionals>

7 USCIS, *First 100 Days: USCIS Delivering on Making America Safe Again*, <https://www.uscis.gov/newsroom/news-releases/first-100-days-uscis-delivering-on-making-america-safe-again>

8 USCIS, *Purpose and Background, “Legal Authorities,”* <https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-1-part-a-chapter-1>

9 NPR, *Logjam of U.S. immigration applications puts millions at greater risk of deportation*, <https://www.npr.org/2026/04/17/nx-s1-5777632/us-trump-immigration-delay-applications-citizenship-deportation>

10 NPR, *Logjam of U.S. immigration applications puts millions at greater risk of deportation*

An additional and particularly alarming feature of this backlog is the emergence of a growing “frontlog” of unprocessed applications. More than 240,000 applications have reportedly been received by USCIS but not yet opened or formally issued a receipt, leaving applicants without proof that their cases are pending.¹¹ Without this documentation, individuals may be unable to maintain lawful status, renew work authorization, or demonstrate compliance with immigration requirements, placing them at heightened risk of enforcement action through no fault of their own. While the frontlog has fluctuated in size under prior administrations, the current number of cases awaiting confirmation of receipt from USCIS is unprecedented. This represents a fundamental breakdown in basic administrative processing and exposes applicants to serious legal consequences despite their compliance with the law.

Taken together, these issues paint an alarming picture. At best, these failures reflect serious incompetence in the administration of immigration benefits. At worst, they suggest a coordinated effort to use taxpayer dollars and applicant fees to degrade and dismantle lawful immigration pathways through delay, cost, and administrative obstruction. Applicants are being asked to pay more, face higher barriers to entry, and in some cases pay for applications that are not being processed at all. At the same time, Congress has provided additional funding specifically to address these challenges. Yet performance continues to decline, and backlogs continue to grow. These concerns are heightened by broader immigration trends showing that, since December of 2024, legal entries have fallen at 2.5 times the rate of illegal entries.¹² This raises serious concerns that these delays and processing freezes may not be isolated administrative failures, but part of a broader pattern that is making it more difficult to pursue lawful immigration.

To better understand the causes and consequences of these delays, we request that USCIS provide detailed responses to the following questions:

- If fee revenue has increased while processing times and backlogs have worsened, how does USCIS explain this discrepancy?
- What percentage of total fee revenue is currently dedicated to adjudications versus non-adjudicative functions?
- Since January 2025, have any USCIS funds, personnel, or contracts been redirected to support enforcement-related activities or other DHS priorities outside the agency's core adjudications mission? If so, please describe in detail.
- What policy or procedural changes implemented since January 2025 have impacted adjudication timelines?
- What steps is USCIS taking to ensure that new policies do not further delay unrelated benefit applications?

¹¹ NPR, *Logjam of U.S. immigration applications puts millions at greater risk of deportation*

¹² CATO Institute, *Trump Has Cut Legal Immigration More Than Illegal Immigration*, https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/data/DHS%20SIGNED%20REPORT_%20USCIS%20IEFA%20FY2024%20Statement%20of%20Financial%20Condition.pdf

- How many applications have been received but not yet opened or receipted (the "frontlog"), and what is the average time between receipt and issuance of a receipt notice?
- What steps is USCIS taking to ensure timely issuance of receipt notices so applicants can demonstrate lawful presence and eligibility for benefits?
- What is the total amount of fees collected since January 2025 for applications that were paused, frozen, or not adjudicated, and under what legal authority does USCIS retain those fees?

USCIS exists to administer lawful immigration pathways efficiently, fairly, and consistent with the law. Individuals attempting to comply with our immigration laws should not be met with higher costs, indefinite delays, and administrative dysfunction.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

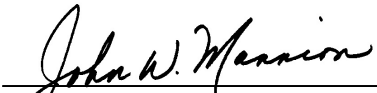
Sincerely,



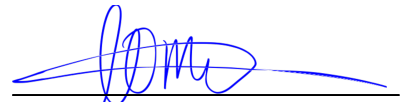
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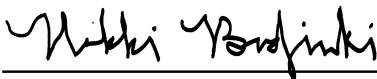
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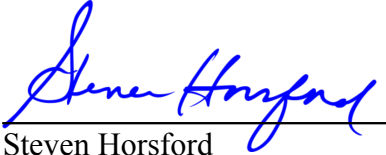
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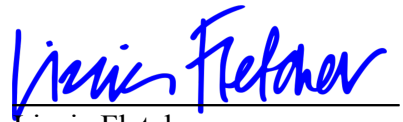
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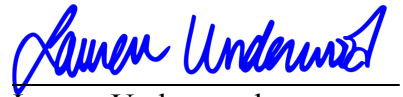
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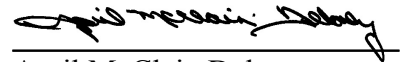
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