

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 28, 2019

L. Francis Cissna
Director
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
20 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20529

Dear Director Cissna,

As you know, the greater Houston metropolitan area is among the fastest-growing and most diverse regions in the United States. We value the contributions to our economic strength that come from that diversity. However, we have increasingly seen a hindrance to our region's future—the inability of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to act in a timely way to serve the Houston area.

As you may be aware, according to your own agency's data, the average time for an I-485 or "green card" application in the Houston area is currently 19.5 to 24 months. In the Los Angeles area, that same application is processed in as little as 13.5. A resident of Queens, New York could have this same application approved, on average, in as little as 12.5 months. In diverse cities like San Bernardino, California the difference is even worse, with I-485 processing running as little as 7.5 months.¹

We face a similar story for N-400 Applications for Naturalizations, with wait times running from 17 months to 21.5 months in the Houston area in comparison to the far shorter 9.5 months in Los Angeles, 10.5 months in Queens, New York. A resident of Long Island, New York could receive approval within 7.5 to 12 months—their maximum wait time. This is five months less than the Houston area's *minimum* wait time. While these numbers might vary, the common conclusion is that the Houston USCIS office lags significantly behind those cities with more and better staffed facilities.

Likewise, our area has seen a considerable slowdown in USCIS processing of Emergency Advanced Parole documents for those who are contributing to the Houston economy but find themselves needing to travel abroad under emergency scenarios. Instead of a rapid response from USCIS staff, constituents have reported that must now work through an untimely labyrinth of contractors before being considered for "emergency" relief. This is unacceptable bureaucracy.

These delays have put significant burdens on the casework staff of our offices and hindered our ability to help constituents dealing with not only your agency, but the host of other agencies we work with. More importantly, it has put a burden on those who live and work in our community and want nothing more than to follow the law. Immigration is a key aspect of our region's economic growth, and USCIS' ability to act in a timely way is imperative to supporting that growth.

Given these concerns, we request information on the following areas to help us better consider upcoming oversight and appropriations efforts in the House of Representatives.

1. How do USCIS resources (staffing *and* offices) in Houston compare to the other largest cities in the United States?
2. What actions has USCIS taken to improve response times in the Houston area? What further actions can be taken in the future?
3. Do you need additional statutory direction or funding to better respond in a timely way?
4. What changes has USCIS made in the Houston area in the handling of Emergency Advanced Parole requests, and do you believe these applications are being handled on a truly "emergency" basis?

Again, thank you for your timely responses to these questions and any further consideration you can give to the resources you provide to the Houston area.

Very respectfully,



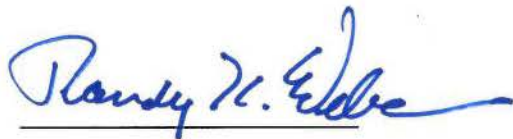
Pete Olson

Member of Congress



Sylvia Garcia

Member of Congress



Randy K. Weber

Member of Congress



Sheila Jackson Lee

Member of Congress



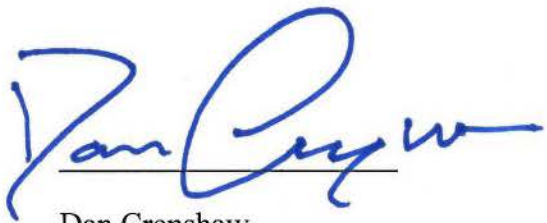
Brian Babin, D.D.S.

Member of Congress



Lizzie Fletcher

Member of Congress



Dan Crenshaw

Member of Congress



Kevin Brady

Member of Congress



Michael T. McCaul

Member of Congress



Al Green

Member of Congress

<https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/>