



Practice Pointer: Navigating the USCIS Contact Center

Changes to the USCIS Contact Center¹

In 2020, USCIS updated the USCIS Contact Center phone-tree system. Specifically, the USCIS Contact Center no longer requires numeric prompts and is now completely speech enabled through an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system. USCIS recently made changes to the IVR so that a caller must first go through the IVR system before reaching live assistance. In other words, **simply saying “live agent”, “operator”, or “agent” will no longer immediately connect a caller to a Tier 1 officer.** Instead, callers must now first engage with the IVR to try and resolve their issue. Members are encouraged to review USCIS’ tip sheet on how to communicate effectively with the Contact Center.² USCIS has informed AILA that this change was due to a high volume of callers not engaging with the IVR on issues that could be handled through automation, and that this was straining USCIS resources and increasing overall wait times.

In addition to the phone tree system changes, there has also been changes to the way stakeholders may reach a Tier 2 Supervisor or Officer. Applicants, petitioners, or legal representatives will no longer be automatically transferred to Tier 2 upon request. Instead, the USCIS Contractor at Tier 1 will determine the urgency of the inquiry and will escalate as either “urgent” or “regular”. Urgent inquiries will receive a call-back from Tier 2 within 72 hours (Monday thru Friday), while regular inquiries will receive a call-back within 30 business days. If an officer responds by phone, the number that may appear in the caller ID is **202-838-2200, or “unknown.”** If unknown caller, the USCIS officer will confirm the service item number issued to the stakeholder at the time of initial contact with USCIS. If by email, the sender will be no-reply@uscis.dhs.gov. It is recommended to add this address to your email contacts list to ensure messages are not sent to a spam folder. If the first call is missed, the USCIS officer will attempt a second call. Please note that call-backs will be conducted between 7:00 a.m. to 6:30pm (EST). USCIS has noted that it will send a text message and/or email one to two business days before initiating contact.³ Unfortunately, if both return calls are missed, a response may have to be repeated through the USCIS Contact Center.

Overview and Tips for Navigating the USCIS Contact Center

¹ This practice alert was updated on 1/10/2022. Special thank you to the USCIS Case Assistance Committee for their contributions.

² See *USCIS Provides Information on How to Use Its Contact Center to Communicate with USCIS*, AM. IMMIGRATION LAWYERS ASS’N (Nov. 9, 2021), AILA Doc. No. 21111204, <https://www.aila.org/infonet/uscis-provides-information-on-how-to-use-contact>.

³ See *Liaison Update: Key Takeaways on the USCIS Contact Center from USCIS Albuquerque Field Office Stakeholder Meeting (12/16/21)*, AM. IMMIGRATION LAWYERS ASS’N (Jan. 6, 2021), AILA Doc. No. 22010607, <https://www.aila.org/advo-media/aila-practice-pointers-and-alerts/liaison-update-key-takeaways-on-the-uscis>.

Below you will find some tips for navigating the USCIS Contact Center, including how to check on the status of a case or to create an inquiry, as well as how to reach a live person upon calling the USCIS Contact Center, such as to create an InfoPass appointment. Note that live help from a USCIS representative is available Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern, except on federal holidays.

The USCIS Contact Center provides escalating levels of service to handle inquiries of increasing complexity, primarily through an IVR system and a multi-tiered level of live assistance. When contacting the USCIS Contact Center, it is important to decide beforehand who will make the call in order to successfully complete an inquiry.

AILA recommends that all members create a log of each call placed to the USCIS Contact Center. The log should include the phone number used when calling, the time (zone) of the call, name and agent ID number, and any tracking or service request (SR) number issued. Creating a log helps keep track of any problematic trends that may occur when attempting to contact the USCIS Contact Center, which can assist in AILA liaison efforts.

- **Tier 1** (Contract employee): Tier 1 is the first level of live assistance. Tier 1 staff members, who are contract employees, provide basic case-specific and general non-case specific information. Tier 1 employees may speak with applicants, petitioners, and attorneys with G-28 on record. There will likely be a wait time and the wait time depends on the time of day. Earlier calls tend to have shorter wait times. There is no option to request a call-back.
- **Tier 2** (USCIS Officer or Supervisor): Tier 2 may speak with applicants, petitioner, and attorneys with G-28 on record. Due to recent changes, **Applicants, petitioners, or legal representatives will no longer be automatically transferred to Tier 2 upon request. Instead, the USCIS Contractor will determine the severity of the inquiry and will escalate as either “urgent” or “regular”.** Urgent inquiries will receive a call-back from Tier 2 within 72 hours, while regular inquiries will receive a call-back within 30 business days. The phone number from which USCIS may call back from is (202) 838-2200.

Tips for Checking Case Status / Placing a Case Inquiry

USCIS now requires that callers must first engage with the IVR to check their case status or to resolve their case problem or issue. If callers are unable to resolve their issue through the IVR prompts, AILA recommends trying to utilize other USCIS tools, such as [Emma](#), USCIS’s computer-generated virtual assistant who can answer questions, or placing an [e-request](#). AILA is aware that members are reporting difficulties in resolving more complex case matters through the IVR system. AILA has continued to engage with USCIS on this issue.⁴ In the meantime, if you are seeking to place an inquiry with USCIS on a complex or urgent case problem and are unable to resolve the issue through the IVR system or other USCIS online tool options such as Emma or placing an e-request, please contact AILA National for assistance at reports@aila.org, subject line “USCIS Contact Center” and we will try to determine the next best steps.

⁴ See e.g., *Walled Off: How USCIS Has Closed Its Doors on Customers and Strayed from Its Statutory Customer Service Mission*, AM. IMMIGRATION LAWYERS ASS’N (Feb. 12, 2021), <https://www.aila.org/advo-media/aila-policy-briefs/policy-brief-walled-off-how-uscis-has-closed>.

Tips:

1. Recommended that inquiries are attempted early in the week.
2. It is best to not leave urgent inquiries for Friday.
3. USCIS requests that attorneys limit their call to no more than [three case inquiries per call](#). If you have more than three case inquiries, you may be asked to call back.
4. It is a good idea to provide your cell phone number as USCIS does not currently provide call-back options to phone numbers with extensions.
5. Make sure your phone's settings are not blocking 'Unknown Callers' as it may be USCIS calling.
6. Keep call log in case you need to later request [AILA case liaison assistance](#). Include time of call, time zone, number called from, number requested to call and Agent ID number in your request for AILA case liaison assistance.

Tips for Requesting an InfoPass/InfoMod Appointment



Call USCIS
Contact
Center
1-800-375-
5283



Say,
"InfoPass"



Will be
placed in
queue to
speak to an
agent.

No call-back
option
available.

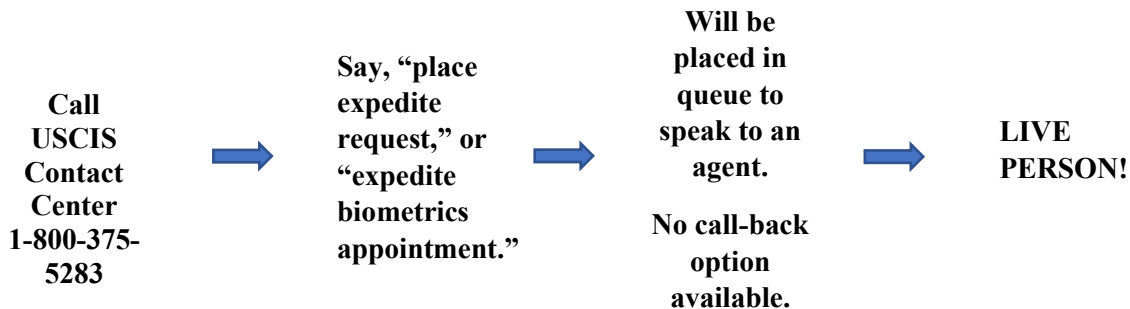


**LIVE
PERSON!**

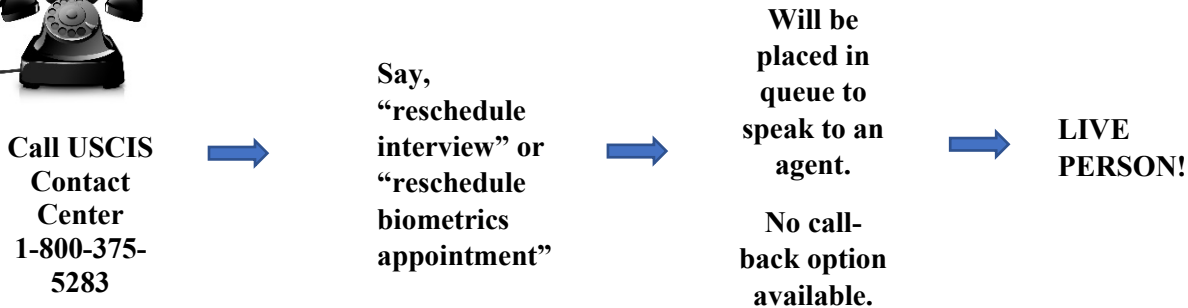
Tips for Requesting an Expedite (adjudication or biometrics)⁵



⁵ See *AILA Practice Pointer: Suggestions for Biometrics Processing*, AM. IMMIGRATION LAWYERS ASS'N (Feb. 3, 2021), AILA Doc. No. 21020332, <https://www.aila.org/advo-media/aila-practice-pointers-and-alerts/practice-pointer-suggestions-for-navigating> for additional tips from AILA's USCIS Case Assistance Committee.



Tips for Requesting to Reschedule an Interview or Reschedule Biometrics⁶



Background Information

On December 21, 2018, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) [announced that it would discontinue the use of its Service Center specific e-mail boxes](#) for case-specific questions, effective January 21, 2019. As a result of these changes, USCIS is now channeling stakeholder communications regarding pending applications or petitions predominantly to either USCIS' online resources via self-help tools at www.uscis.gov/tools and <https://my.uscis.gov>, or to the [USCIS Contact Center](#) (1-800-375-5283). Note that some applications and petitions have their own designated phone line or email box separate from the USCIS Contact Center. For example, USCIS provides a phone number exclusively for inquiries about petitions filed under the Premium Processing program (1-866-315-5718). USCIS has also established separate email addresses to inquire about a specific T, U, and VAWA case (hotlinefollowup1360.vsc@dhs.gov, hotlinefollowup1918I914.vsc@dhs.gov). Please note that the VSC Humanitarian phone number is no longer in service.

⁶ Please be sure to follow instructions for rescheduling biometrics provided on the Application Support Center (ASC) appointment notice first.

The Information Services Modernization (InfoMod) program is now in full effect across all USCIS Field Offices. InfoMod requires stakeholders to schedule InfoPass appointments by calling the USCIS Contact Center via the 1-800 number, replacing the previous self-scheduling system. For more information about this change, please see [AILA Practice Pointer: Changes to the InfoPass Scheduling System at Local USCIS Field Offices](#), Doc. No. 18020500.

If applicants are currently in need of an emergency InfoPass/InfoMod appointment, please refer to our [Practice Alert: Availability of InfoPass/InfoMod Appointments During COVID-19 Pandemic](#) for further guidance, Doc No. 20081331.