

BCIS REPORTER

Houston District Office

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Director's Corner

First and foremost, I want to thank all of our colleagues and the public for patience and continued support of our new agency. We'll experience some growing pains as we transition into Department of Homeland Security, but I assure you that I will continue to keep our lines of communication open.

As the Director for the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, I have been focusing my efforts into improving our customer service. The Houston District has initiated a Customer Service Challenge to provide better customer service, reduce long lines and waiting time. As part of this initiative, a forms information area has been created. Customers can now directly access forms at the district without waiting in line to speak to an Information Officer. We have posted new signs in the lobby providing information on processing times, visa availability bulletins, and instructions on renewal of Legal Permanent Residency Cards. The signs should answer some of the inquiries thus eliminating the need to wait in line for a number to speak to an officer.

We are also exploring the means to provide forms and information to Community Based Organizations, libraries, congressional offices, and other non-governmental offices thus eliminating the need for customers to visit the district office. We have established a Correspondence/Case Resolution Team to address written status inquiries. The team is made up of District Adjudication Officers and Information

Officers and is currently tackling a backlog of status inquires. We anticipate that the wait time for a response to status inquiries will be greatly reduced. A new satellite office will be open next month to conduct interviews for Adjustment of Status Cases. The new facility should free up some space at the district to explore some new programs. As a consequence of the staffing shortages during the Special Registration, we have fallen behind in the adjudication of some of our cases. We are focusing our efforts in bringing our applications current. We have begun accepting applications by mail, which should eliminate the waiting time for those filing applications at the district. In June, we will only be accepting applications by mail. My staff and I are committed to providing timely receipts so that those filing will have the proof needed.

In May, my officers and I have partnered with the local Telemundo Community Outreach in holding weekly "Immigration in the neighborhood" outreach sessions. The reception has been tremendous with a total of over 2,000 customers served during these weekly information sessions. The personalized ser-



vice delivered from an outstanding team of BCIS Officers is invaluable, thus alleviating the public's need to visit the district office. This initiative has been part of the "Customer Service Challenge" that the district has commenced in hopes of reducing customer lines and wait time.

As we continue to meet new challenges, we remain a team committed to enforcing our national security concerns with a commitment to providing our immigrant community the best services that we can offer. As always, I welcome your suggestions and look forward to hearing from you.

Hipolito M. Acosta

Points of Interest

- Naturalization Ceremony— July 18, 2003
- July 1, 2003 (Children)
- The new web site is www.immigration.gov
- 6/12/03 Outreach at Holy Ghost Catholic Church
- 6/14/03 Gene Green's Citizenship Day

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EXECUTIVE ORDER ON EXPEDITED NATURALIZATION FOR MILITARY PERSONNEL & POSTHUMOUS U.S. CITIZENSHIP



EXPEDITED NATURALIZATION:

Persons Serving honorably in active duty in the United States military during specified periods of military hostilities may be immediately eligible to apply for naturalization under Executive Order 13269, signed by President Bush on July 3, 2002. President Bush designated the war on terrorism, which includes the current conflict in Iraq, as such a period. Act (INA) requires aliens to reside in the United States for at least five years after being lawfully admitted before they are eligible to apply for citizenship. Both legal permanent residents enlisted in the U.S. military and service members who have not been lawfully admitted for permanent residence*, however, are eligible to apply for citizenship

after three years of active service. Persons who were on active duty on September 11, 2001, or after, but have since been honorably discharged from the military may also be eligible for expedited naturalization.

Requests for expedited citizenship for members of the Armed Forces are processed at the BCIS Nebraska Service Center. To date the Nebraska Service Center has processed over 5,000 requests for expedited citizenship for military applicants from July 2002 to the present. Field Offices coordinate the interview and the issuance of the naturalization certificates. Special naturalization ceremonies are regularly held across the country. For example, on April 11 twenty members of the Armed Forces were naturalized in San Diego, days before their deployment.

POSTHUMOUS CITIZENSHIP:

Posthumous Citizenship is a honorary status commemorating the bravery and sacrifices of the deceased, however there are no immigration benefits conveyed to the relatives. Posthumous

Citizenship can be granted to legal permanent residents of the United States whose death resulted from injury or disease incurred while on active duty with U.S. Armed Forces during specified periods of military hostilities. The INA requires immediate relatives of the deceased, a representative authorized by the family or a service organization to file an Application for Posthumous Citizenship (Form N-644) with the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services. The application requires supporting documents, including a certificate of release of discharge from active duty and military state-issued death certificate. The application must be filed no later than two years after the date of the person's death. Citizenship is granted retroactively to the date of the beneficiary's death. Applications for Posthumous Citizenship are submitted to the California Service Centers (CSC), in close coordination with military officials and the families, the CSC processes such application expeditiously.

*Title 8. Code of Federal Regulations Part 329.2C provide for ways a service member may satisfy the permanent residence requirements.

BUREAU OF CITIZENSHIP & IMMIGRATION SERVICES DIRECTOR VISITS HOUSTON

B CIS Director Eduardo Aguirre, visited with the 400+ employees of the Houston District's Bureau of Citizenship & Immigration Service. Director Aguirre patiently explained how this transition would work, and how this extraordinary transition would go through without major disruptions to normal everyday operations. In fact, Director Aguirre admired the tireless dedication and professionalism, and wanted to personally thank each employee present.

Director Aguirre also participated in the Naturalization Ceremony for approximately 2,500 new U.S. Citizens. He welcomed the new citizens and encouraged them to take part in the democratic U.S. process of voting. Director Aguirre then took the time to visit with over 400 district employees and addressed his ideas and concerns, but also made a few hours available to listen carefully to each individual concern from the staff.

BCIS BEGINS OFFERING "ONLINE" FILING FOR TWO POPULAR IMMIGRATION FORMS

The Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS) started accepting electronic filing (e-filing) of two of the most commonly submitted immigration forms— the application used to renew or replace a "green card" (Form I-90) and the Application for Employment Authorization (Form I-765). Together, both forms represent approximately 30 percent of the 7 million applications filed with the Bureau every year.

For those who file electronically, BCIS confirms the identity of the customer early in the application process. BCIS also electronically collects a photograph, signature, and fingerprint for the individual. Biometric data are stored and can be used later for verification of the person's identity. Customers whose applications are approved receive high quality immigration documents with special security features produced from BCIS' centralized card production facility.

"For the first time in our history, BCIS is able to offer our customers the option of filing for certain immigration benefits using the Internet, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week," said Acting Director Eduardo Aguirre. "E-Filing is part of our ongoing effort to provide simpler, more convenient ways for customers to interact with BCIS while meeting our national security objectives," he added.

Customers who e-file do not have to submit photographs at the time they file their applications. Instead, they will schedule themselves for an appointment to visit an Application Support Center (ASC) at a convenient time for the electronic collection of a photograph, signature, and fingerprint. After filing electronically, customers will schedule their appointment by calling the National Customer Service Center at (800) 375-5283.

The Employment Authorization and "green card" replacement applications were selected as the first forms for e-filing because they account for approximately 30 percent of the applications received annually by the BCIS. Additionally, these forms are relatively easy to complete and require very little supporting documentation because these individuals already have records on file with BCIS. Electronic filing for other immigration applications will be phased in over the next several years.

As an added convenience, customers who e-file will also be able to pay the fees for these applications online through the electronic transfer of U.S. funds from their checking or savings account, eliminating the need to obtain a money order or cashier's check. The BCIS plans to start accepting credit card payments for e-filed cases later this year. For additional information on e-filing requirements, please visit us at www.bcis.gov.

BCIS customers who have e-filed or who have an application pending at one of BCIS' Service Centers can check the status of their application on line by visiting www.bcis.gov. The website also provides information and forms online for users to download free of charge. Electronic filing is a key facet of BCIS' Immigration Service Modernization program, a 10-year effort to transform the delivery of immigration services. The initiative focuses on improvements in a wide range of areas, including customer service, employee development, technology and processes, and management infrastructure.

FILING IMMIGRATION APPLICATIONS IS NOW EASIER

The Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS) Houston District office will begin accepting applications by mail beginning May 3, 2003. The BCIS Houston office will continue to accept hand-delivered applications through June 2003 only. This time overlap will ensure a smooth transition for the new filing procedures. All applications filed with the local BCIS office must be mailed-along with supporting documentation-for the following petitions:

Adjustment of Status (Form I-485)
Advanced Parole (Form I-131's); and
Employment Authorization Documents (Form I-765).

Applications should be mailed to the following address:

**BCIS
126 Northpoint Drive
Houston, Texas 77060**

This new filing-by-mail process will allow the BCIS office to focus on providing our customers better service, while reducing wait times for those who need to visit our office on urgent matters. **Important Reminder to Applicants: Make copies of your petitions and applications before mailing them. The BCIS office will send receipts to applicants to confirm the application has been accepted.**

To obtain forms for BCIS benefits, you may visit the BCIS webpage at the www.immigration.gov address, or you may call the toll-free number 1-800-375-5283.

**BUREAU OF CITIZENSHIP & IMMIGRATION SERVICES
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This is an unofficial electronic newsletter published monthly by the Houston Bureau of Citizenship & Immigration Services to help provide immigration-related information to BCIS external audiences. This publication should include but is not limited to our monthly progress report, web site, phone numbers, contact names, brief explanations of BCIS processes and procedures.

For more information check our web site at
www.immigration.gov