HOUSE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT
AND ACCOUNTABILITY
RANKING MEMBER

JAMIE RASKIN
8TH DISTRICT, MARYLAND

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3006

WASHINGTON OFFICE
2242 RAYBURN HOB
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-5341
————
DISTRICT OFFICE
51 MONROE STREET
SUITE 503
ROCKVILLE, MD 20850
(301) 354-1000

raskin.house.gov

June 20, 2024

Director Ur Jaddou
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Immigration Records and Identity Services Directorate
5900 Capital Gateway Drive
Camp Springs, MD 20588

Dear Director Jaddou:

I am writing to you to applaud U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for its recent steps to reduce fees for the Genealogy Program's Index Searches and Records Requests and to streamline access to historical records. Thank you for these important actions, which will improve access to important immigration records, making history more accessible to the public.

The USCIS fee-for-service Genealogy Program provides historians, researchers, students, and the public access to historical immigration and naturalization records of deceased immigrants. These records play an important role in U.S. history by telling the story of 19th and 20th century immigration to the United States. Further, the records can help individuals who want to prove their eligibility for dual citizenship and can be used by probate attorneys to prove heredity. When USCIS launched the Genealogy Program in 2008, the agency did so to more effectively manage its historical records and to prevent requesters from being delayed by the longer processing times associated with Freedom of Information Act requests. Most requesters seeking records from the Genealogy Program follow a two-step process: first, submitting an Index Search to determine what records might be available, and second, filing a Records Request. Both steps require fees to be paid.

While I greatly appreciate your recent actions to reduce fees and to otherwise streamline the Genealogy Program, I continue to have concerns regarding the extended response times for these types of requests. Your website states that processing times are approximately 245 and 275

business days for Index Searches and Records Requests, respectively, and it appears that these publicly displayed processing times have not been updated since December 2022.[1]

I have also heard reports of some concerns with the Genealogy Program, including reports of requestors receiving incorrect responses, poor quality scans of documents, excessive redactions of information, and the delayed transfer of relevant immigration and naturalization records, as well as the searchable Microfilm Digitization Application System that provides an automated means for searching and retrieving immigrant records, to the National Archives and Records Administration.

To better understand how the USCIS Immigration Records and Identity Services Directorate, which manages the Genealogy Program, is working to address the current backlog, I respectfully request responses to the following questions:

1. What steps is the USCIS Genealogy Program currently taking and planning to take to reduce the backlog of record requests, and what is the timeline for completing these steps?

2. The USCIS website states that "status information is updated on a monthly basis;" however, as of the writing of this letter, processing times have not been updated since December 28, 2022.[2] When does USCIS plan to update this information?

3. Especially given that USCIS had to adjust its fee schedule to fully recover costs and maintain adequate service,[3] what steps is USCIS taking to transfer these records to the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), where the public would no longer need to pay to access the information, and which simultaneously would relieve USCIS of the burden of responding to these requests?

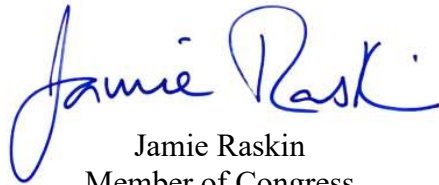4. What is USCIS's estimated timeframe for completing the transfer of applicable records to NARA?

---

[1] *Request Status*, U.S. CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES, (last visited June 20, 2024), https://www.uscis.gov/records/genealogy/genealogical-records-help/request-status.
[2] See *Request Status*, supra note 1.
[3] *U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Fee Schedule and Changes to Certain Other Immigration Benefit Request Requirements*, FEDERAL REGISTER, (January 31, 2024), https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/01/31/2024-01427/us-citizenship-and-immigration-services-fee-schedule-and-changes-to-certain-other-immigration.

I hope to work together with USCIS to overcome any barriers to expedient responses to Index Searches and Records Requests, and to improve the public's access to immigration and naturalization data. I look forward to your responses.

Very truly yours,

Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress

**U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services**

July 17, 2024

The Honorable Jamie Raskin
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Raskin:

Thank you for your June 20, 2024 letter to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

I appreciate your positive feedback regarding the USCIS Genealogy Program and for sharing your concerns about the response times for the index searches and records requests. USCIS has allocated resources to reduce the genealogy pending request queue and improve response times, and we continue to explore other avenues for addressing response times. The USCIS Genealogy Program response times listed on the Genealogy Request Status page on the USCIS website displays the response time of 243 business days for an index search and 263 business days for a records request as of June 27, 2024. USCIS will update the response times on a monthly basis beginning August 1, 2024.

In addition, USCIS is currently working with the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) for the legal transfer of digitized records for individuals born 100 years ago or more contained within the Microfilm Digitization Application System (MiDAS), which were transferred to NARA in January 2022. NARA is currently in the process of developing a technical means to view and search these MiDAS records. NARA has taken legal custody of the Flexoline Index records of Alien Registration forms, originally created under the Alien Registration Act of 1940. Additionally, NARA is currently reviewing a draft retention schedule for paper Certificate Files (C-files). Upon approval of the C-file retention schedule, USCIS can begin transferring these paper records to NARA's legal custody.

USCIS continues to work with NARA to transfer into NARA's legal custody other historical records within MiDAS, including digitized versions of C-files and Master Index system records. USCIS hopes to finalize that transfer in the coming months. USCIS is also developing a messaging campaign to inform the public of the records transfer and how to contact NARA to request these types of records for genealogy or other purposes directly from NARA. USCIS' partnership with NARA and transfer of records will make these records more accessible to the public and will reduce wait times for genealogy requests.

Thank you again for your letter and interest in this important issue. Should you require any additional assistance, please have your staff contact the USCIS Office of Legislative Affairs at (240) 721-3801.

Respectfully,

Ur M. Jaddou
Director