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From: mail.relay@mailmanager.net [<mailto:mail.relay@mailmanager.net>] On
Behalf Of Erin Thompson
Sent: Tuesday, March 13, 2007 9:39 AM
To: Director of Regulatory Management Division
Subject: Tear down the "Second Wall" to Citizenship!

Erin Thompson
5 Kingston Place
HUNTINGTON STATION, NY 11746-3806

March 13, 2007

Director of Regulatory Management Division US Citizenship and
Immigration Services, Department of Homeland Security
111 Massachusetts Ave. NW, 3rd floor
Washington, DC 20529

Dear Director of Regulatory Management Division:

RE: DHS Docket # USCIS-2006-0044

Proposed rule- Adjustment of the Immigration and Naturalization Benefit
Application and Petition Fee Schedule

I am writing to strongly oppose the increase to immigration and
naturalization fees that US Citizenship and Immigration Services
(USCIS)

proposed on February 1, 2007.

Many of the immigrants and refugees we work with on a daily basis
already struggle to pay immigration fees. The steep increases proposed
by USCIS,

which in some cases double the current fee, would put the goals of
gaining permanent resident status, reuniting with family members, and
ultimately

becoming a US citizen farther out of reach. USCIS should be building
bridges for immigrants to move toward citizenship, not putting up
walls.

The proposed fee for naturalization is particularly jarring. As
recently

as 1998, the cost to apply for citizenship was \$95. In 2002, after the
Bush Administration took office, the costs (including biometric fees)
went up from \$250 to \$310. The total fees are now \$400, a fourfold
increase in the past eight years. Now USCIS is proposing a further
increase of 70%, to \$675. An immigrant working at a minimum-wage job
would need to work for more than three weeks and save all of his
earnings in order to pay this fee.

Even more startling is the proposed cost of filing for adjustment of status, which for many immigrants is the first step on the road leading to US citizenship. That application has risen from \$130 in 1998 to \$325 today, plus \$75 for biometrics. Under the proposed rule, the price will rise to \$905 plus \$80 for biometrics. In other words, it will cost nearly \$1,000 for an immigrant to get a green card and start the five-year countdown to citizenship. A minimum-wage immigrant worker would need to save a full month's pay to afford the proposed fee.

USCIS claims that the fee increase is necessary to improve service. USCIS definitely needs to improve service, as shown by the continuing backlogs

in application processing and the monthslong even years-long) delays caused by security checks. Last October, the Government

Accountability Office reported that the agency had lost track of 110,000

files needed to process citizenship cases. We applaud USCIS's efforts to

improve service. We nevertheless believe that the burden of paying for such improvements should not rest solely with immigrants who are already

struggling to pay agency costs and receiving poor service.

USCIS also argues that it has no other option than raising fees if it wants to cover its costs. In fact, there are no laws that require USCIS to fund all of its operations through fees. Nothing prevents USCIS from pursuing other sources of revenue, including asking Congress for appropriations. Indeed, USCIS has sought and received Congressional funding several times in the past

Most basically, immigration and citizenship are public goods that benefit our entire country and that we as a nation should help pay for. Immigrants

bring their talent and hard work to our economy. They pay taxes and help

revitalize our communities. In becoming citizens, immigrants demonstrate

their strong commitment to their new home country by learning English, gaining knowledge about American history and government, and swearing allegiance to the United States. It is little wonder that newly naturalized citizens, eager to participate in our democracy, consistently vote at higher rates than other citizens. We should be encouraging immigrants to become part of our community by gaining legal status and becoming citizens, not setting up barriers that block their path and keep them out.

For all these reasons, the proposal to increase immigration fees is misguided and counterproductive. We urge USCIS to reconsider this

proposal, and to seek other sources of funding for its operations, rather than add more burdens on immigrants. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Erin Thompson