



## American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee

1732 Wisconsin Ave., NW | Washington, DC 20007 | [www.adc.org](http://www.adc.org)

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### In Memoriam

Hala Salaam Maksoud, PhD  
(1943-2002)  
Alex Odeh  
(1944-1985)

March 26, 2007

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

### RE: DHS Docket # USCIS-2006-0044

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

On behalf of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), I write you to strongly oppose the increase in immigration and naturalization fees that US Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) proposed on February 1, 2007.

The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) is a civil rights organization committed to defending the rights of people of Arab descent and promoting their rich cultural heritage. ADC, which is non-sectarian and non-partisan, is the largest Arab-American grassroots civil rights organization. It was founded in 1980 by former United States Senator James Abourezk, and has 38 chapters nationwide and members in all 50 States.

As part of its work, ADC represents a large number of Arab-American immigrants. In particular, ADC's work involves informing the community about immigration policies and laws; assisting immigrants with petitions for naturalization and adjustment, parole, and asylum; advocating for immigration reform legislation that strengthens the rights of families, children, and refugees; and working with government agencies to address naturalization and other immigration-related concerns.

Arab immigration to the United States began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and continues until present. Today, most Arab Americans are US citizens and almost half are natural born citizens. Many of these US-born and naturalized Arab Americans file immigration petitions for their family members so that they can start their path towards citizenship. Individuals who file for naturalization already struggle to pay these filing fees.



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The proposed fee increase by USCIS, which in some cases would double the current fees, would add a heavy burden on immigrant applicants and would impact the opportunity these applicants have to achieve permanent resident status, reunite with family members, and ultimately become US citizens.

The proposed fee increase for naturalization is particularly troubling. 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. Such a vast fee increase will have a negative impact on the Arab-American immigrant community and will delay many from filing for naturalization because of the lack of funds.

Even more troublesome is the proposed cost of filing for adjustment of status, which for many immigrants is the first step on the road to US citizenship. That application fee 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 apply for a green card and start the five-year countdown to citizenship.

In addition to paying the standard petition fees, thousands of Arab immigrants have been forced to engage in costly litigation as a result of severe delays in their naturalization processing. Because of the unexplained delays in petition processing beyond the mandatory 120-day post-interview time period, individuals are forced to engage in litigation to compel USCIS to process their naturalization petitions. This process adds to thousands of dollars to the standard naturalization fees that these individuals pay.

USCIS claims that the fee increase is necessary to improve service. USCIS clearly must take significant steps to improve service, as shown by the continuing backlogs in application processing and the months-long (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 with DHS CRCL office.

ADC is now working on over 200 naturalization delay cases and has filed sixty-six cases administratively with the DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties. Although immigrants and their families have properly paid, their naturalization application fees continue to face backlogs and delays in the processing of their applications, as well as reduced customer service.

We acknowledge USCIS' efforts to improve service, but we believe that the burden of paying for such improvements should not rest solely with immigrants who are already struggling to pay agency costs, and yet are receiving poor service.

USCIS also argues that it has no other option than raising fees if it wishes 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, and could certainly do the same now. We encourage USCIS to seek such funding from Congress so as not to place the burden of correcting government inefficiencies on immigrants.



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More importantly, immigration and citizenship are public services that benefit our entire country and for which we as nation, should help pay. Immigrants bring their talent and hard work to our economy and actively contribute to the betterment of our nation. They pay taxes and help revitalize our communities. In becoming citizens, immigrants demonstrate their strong commitment to the United States by learning English, gaining knowledge about American history and government, and swearing allegiance to the United States. Newly naturalized Arab-American citizens actively participate in our democracy, and register to vote at increasing rates. Therefore, we must continue to encourage immigrants to become part of our community by gaining legal status and becoming citizens.

For all these reasons, ADC believes that the proposal to increase immigration fees is misguided and counterproductive. We strongly urge USCIS to reconsider this proposal, and to seek other sources of funding for its operations.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Carol Khawly, MA, JD  
Director of Legal Advocacy