



## FAX COVER

### Fresno Interdenominational Refugee Ministries, Inc (FIRM)

1940 N. Fresno Street, Fresno CA 93703 Telephone (559) 487-1500, FAX (559) 487-1550

Email: [soulhikr@aol.com](mailto:soulhikr@aol.com) Website: [www.firminc.org](http://www.firminc.org)

"Sharing Christ's Love to Build Communities of Hope With New Americans"

#### FIRM, Inc.,

A faith-based 501 c-3 non-profit organization, provides direct services, referrals and cross-cultural resources to Southeast Asian, Slavic, Ethiopian, Armenian and Hispanic refugee and immigrant communities in Fresno County, as well as advocacy & presentations to promote dialogue and understanding among various cultures in the United States.

#### PROGRAM & MINISTRIES

- Neighborhood Ministries
- Theological Education
- Employment
- Healthy Homes
- Slavic Kids in Focus
- Hmong Health Navigation
- Family Advocacy Services
- Community Gardens
- Summerset Community

TO: Federal eRulemaking Portal

FAX: 866-466-5370

FROM: FIRM

DATE: 3/30/07

No. of pages including cover: 10

Comments on proposed USCIS Fee  
Increases - DHS Docket # USCIS-  
2006-0044.



# FIRM, Inc.

## Fresno Interdenominational Refugee Ministries

1940 N. Fresno Street, Fresno, CA 93703 Website: [www.firminc.org](http://www.firminc.org).

Telephone (559) 487-1500 FAX (559) 487-1550 Email: [soulhikr@aol.com](mailto:soulhikr@aol.com)

"Sharing Christ's Love to Build Communities of Hope With New Americans"

### Executive Director

Rev. Sharon Stanley

### BOARD OFFICERS

#### Chair

Jess Negrete

#### Vice Chair

Pastor Mitt Moua

#### Secretary

Betty Higdon

#### Treasurer

Tom Davey

### ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

#### Office Manager

Lorna Bosavanh

#### Financial Manager

Richard Fuhrmann

### PROGRAMS & MINISTRIES

#### Theological Education

Dr. Stanley Friesen

#### Employment

Alan Lopes

Paula Cha

Sam Vongsanit

Tout Tou Bountapanya

Hien Vu

#### Neighborhood Ministries

Maggie Jamison

and staff

#### Slavic Kids in Focus

Andrey Kovalenko

Yelena Vaipan

Vera Shelest

#### Healthy Homes

John Bosavanh

Ilya Danilyuk

Randy Vang

#### Hmong Health Navigation

Rev. Sophia DeWitt

Youa Vang

Franklin Yang

#### Family Advocacy Services

Rev. Jay Tzerge Yang

May Vang

Tony Bounthapanya

Sara Fast

Sam Chang

#### Community Gardens

Randy Vang

#### Summerset Community

Soukan Channita, Chair

March 30, 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

**Fresno Interdenominational Refugee Ministries(FIRM, Inc.) is deeply concerned about the proposed USCIS fee increase referenced above.**

FIRM serves more than 6,500 refugees annually, many from Southeast Asia and the former Soviet Union, through a variety of programs including Employment, Health, Housing, Elder and Preschool services. **One of our primary areas of service for the last 10 years has also been ESL and Citizenship training and assistance with completing Adjustment of Status and Citizenship applications. We are pleased to have assisted hundreds of refugees to overcome language and other barriers to become American citizens.**

We are troubled by the sheer size and scope of the fee increase. USCIS plans to increase citizenship fees from \$400 (\$330 application fee plus \$70 biometric fee) to \$675 (\$595 application fee plus \$80 biometric fee), an increase of 69 percent. It would also raise fees for 37 other immigration and naturalization petitions and applications at an average increase of 66%. Furthermore, it appears that the increase will take place at once rather than being spread out over a period of time.

Rapid fee hikes of such magnitude will have a disproportionate and detrimental impact on the Asian American community, many of whom are refugees fleeing persecution, and on the broader refugee community. As the following figures reflect, Asian Americans constitute a significant portion of USCIS's customer base:

- 39% of people who naturalized in 2005 were born in Asia.
- Five of the top ten countries of birth for new U.S. citizens are Asian (Philippines, India, Vietnam, People's Republic of China, and Korea).
- 36% of people who became lawful permanent residents (LPRs) in 2005 were born in Asia.
- Five of the top ten countries of birth for new LPRs are Asian (India, China, Philippines, Vietnam, and Korea).
- Significant number of asylees and refugees came from Asian countries such as Laos (16% of refugees admitted in 2005) and China (21% of asylum granted in 2005).

*"I'm laying a FIRM foundation...no one who trusts in it will ever be disappointed."* Isaiah 28:16

**FIRM's primary populations of service include Hmong and Lao individuals, both from Laos, all of whom had to flee their homeland because of support of U.S. policies during the Vietnam war era. Their deep commitment to this country and its ideals cost them everything, yet their desire to be American citizens and fully contribute to this country is strong.**

The massive and abrupt fee increase proposed by USCIS will delay or prevent Asian Americans from becoming U.S. citizens, reuniting with their families, contributing their knowledge and skills to our economy, and settling into our society after having escaped persecution.

- A family of four LPRs who want to apply for U.S. citizenship at the same time will now have to have \$2,700 at their disposal in order to achieve their American dream together.
- A family of four who have been granted asylum in the U.S. and applying for permanent residence will now have to have \$3,620 in hand in order to apply for permanent residence.
- Furthermore, asylees applying for permanent residence will not be able to apply for fee waivers no matter how dire their financial situation may be, because USCIS intends to categorically eliminate fee waivers for I-485 applications for adjustment as a part of the fee increase.

The proposal justifies the elimination of the fee waivers for I-485s on the ground that "[a]pplicants for permanent residence must demonstrate that they can support themselves and will not become a public charge." But such rationale does not and should not apply to asylees, who are exempt from the public charge ground of inadmissibility. 8 C.F.R. §209.2(a)(1)(v).

- The proposal would also prohibit U.S. citizens and LPRs from requesting fee waivers on I-130 relative petitions on the ground that the petitioners must file affidavits of support to show that they can support the beneficiaries if they are not able to do so themselves. But such a rationale ignores the fact that given the current backlogs in the family immigration system, it may be years, sometimes even decades, before the petitioners will have to file affidavits of support for the beneficiaries. For example, a U.S. citizen mother who is petitioning for her adult son or daughter from the country of Philippines will have to wait approximately 14 years from the time that she files the I-130 petition to when the visa for her child becomes available and needs the affidavit of support.

The elimination of fee waivers for I-130 family petitions would place many U.S. citizens and LPRs in a Catch-22: They must file the I-130 petitions in order to establish their families' place in line, yet be delayed or prevented altogether from doing so because of financial difficulties that will no longer exist by the time that the visas for their families finally become available and they have to file the necessary affidavits of support.

The fee hike and the blanket ban on fee waivers on certain applications and petitions would be particularly burdensome to the roughly 12% of the Asian American community who live below the poverty level, including many refugees. The proposed fee increases will put citizenship and adjustment of status simply out of reach.

Given the speed, scope and scale of the proposed fee increase, we believe that USCIS customers must receive faster, greater, and more concrete improvements in processing times and customer service. The fee increase proposal itself does not appear to set forth any concrete targets for improvement in these areas. The USCIS press release announcing the fee increase proposal states that the fee hike, "if implemented in full by this summer," will result in "a 20 percent reduction in average application processing times by the end of fiscal year 2009." A hike in prices by an average of 66 percent now in return for a 20 percent reduction in

processing times two to three years down the road is not "they type of exceptional immigration service that our nation expects or deserves."

Finally, we believe that certain improvements which the USCIS wants to finance through the fee increase would be better addressed through the normal budget and appropriation process. For example, while we support USCIS's efforts to improve its fraud detection capacity and to modernize its business and technological infrastructure, we do not believe that immigrants and their families should bear the sole burden for these efforts. These improvements will benefit the immigration system and the national interest as a whole, and the budgetary process would be the best mechanism for Congress, USCIS, its customers, and other interested parties to determine how such functions would be optimally funded.

In conclusion, we urge USCIS to reconsider the proposed fee increase. We hope that the agency will work with immigrant communities and with Congress to develop a functioning, effective immigration system that will benefit our country.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rev. Sharon Stanley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev. Sharon Stanley  
FIRM Founder and Executive Director



# FIRM, Inc.

## Fresno Interdenominational Refugee Ministries

1940 N. Fresno Street, Fresno, CA 93703 Website: [www.firminc.org](http://www.firminc.org)

Telephone (559) 487-1500 FAX (559) 487-1550 Email: [soulhikr@aol.com](mailto:soulhikr@aol.com)

"Sharing Christ's Love to Build Communities of Hope With New Americans"

### Executive Director

Rev. Sharon Stanley

### BOARD OFFICERS

#### Chair

Jess Negrete

#### Vice Chair

Pastor Mitt Moua

#### Secretary

Betty Higdon

#### Treasurer

Tom Davey

### ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

#### Office Manager

Lorna Bosavanh

#### Financial Manager

Richard Fuhrmann

### PROGRAMS & MINISTRIES

#### Theological Education

Dr. Stanley Friesen

#### Employment

Alan Lopes

Paula Cha

Sam Vongsanit

Tout Tou Bountapanya

Hien Vu

#### Neighborhood Ministries

Maggie Jamison

and staff

#### Slavic Kids in Focus

Andrey Kovalenko

Yelena Vaipan

Vera Shelest

#### Healthy Homes

John Bosavanh

Ilya Danilyuk

Randy Vang

#### Hmong Health Navigation

Rev. Sophia DeWitt

Youa Vang

Franklin Yang

#### Family Advocacy Services

Rev. Jay Tzerge Yang

May Vang

Tony Bounthapanya

Sara Fast

Sam Chang

#### Community Gardens

Randy Vang

#### Summerset Community

Soukan Channita, Chair

March 30, 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

**Fresno Interdenominational Refugee Ministries(FIRM, Inc.) is deeply concerned about the proposed USCIS fee increase referenced above.**

FIRM serves more than 6,500 refugees annually, many from Southeast Asia and the former Soviet Union, through a variety of programs including Employment, Health, Housing, Elder and Preschool services. **One of our primary areas of service for the last 10 years has also been ESL and Citizenship training and assistance with completing Adjustment of Status and Citizenship applications. We are pleased to have assisted hundreds of refugees to overcome language and other barriers to become American citizens.**

We are troubled by the sheer size and scope of the fee increase. USCIS plans to increase citizenship fees from \$400 (\$330 application fee plus \$70 biometric fee) to \$675 (\$595 application fee plus \$80 biometric fee), an increase of 69 percent. It would also raise fees for 37 other immigration and naturalization petitions and applications at an average increase of 66%. Furthermore, it appears that the increase will take place at once rather than being spread out over a period of time.

Rapid fee hikes of such magnitude will have a disproportionate and detrimental impact on the Asian American community, many of whom are refugees fleeing persecution, and on the broader refugee community. As the following figures reflect, Asian Americans constitute a significant portion of USCIS's customer base:

- 39% of people who naturalized in 2005 were born in Asia.
- Five of the top ten countries of birth for new U.S. citizens are Asian (Philippines, India, Vietnam, People's Republic of China, and Korea).
- 36% of people who became lawful permanent residents (LPRs) in 2005 were born in Asia.
- Five of the top ten countries of birth for new LPRs are Asian (India, China, Philippines, Vietnam, and Korea).
- Significant number of asylees and refugees came from Asian countries such as Laos (16% of refugees admitted in 2005) and China (21% of asylum granted in 2005).

*"I'm laying a FIRM foundation....no one who trusts in it will ever be disappointed."* Isaiah 28:16

**FIRM's primary populations of service include Hmong and Lao individuals, both from Laos, all of whom had to flee their homeland because of support of U.S. policies during the Vietnam war era. Their deep commitment to this country and its ideals cost them everything, yet their desire to be American citizens and fully contribute to this country is strong.**

The massive and abrupt fee increase proposed by USCIS will delay or prevent Asian Americans from becoming U.S. citizens, reuniting with their families, contributing their knowledge and skills to our economy, and settling into our society after having escaped persecution.

- A family of four LPRs who want to apply for U.S. citizenship at the same time will now have to have \$2,700 at their disposal in order to achieve their American dream together.
- A family of four who have been granted asylum in the U.S. and applying for permanent residence will now have to have \$3,620 in hand in order to apply for permanent residence.
- Furthermore, asylees applying for permanent residence will not be able to apply for fee waivers no matter how dire their financial situation may be, because USCIS intends to categorically eliminate fee waivers for I-485 applications for adjustment as a part of the fee increase.

The proposal justifies the elimination of the fee waivers for I-485s on the ground that "[a]pplicants for permanent residence must demonstrate that they can support themselves and will not become a public charge." But such rationale does not and should not apply to asylees, who are exempt from the public charge ground of inadmissibility. 8 C.F.R. §209.2(a)(1)(v).

- The proposal would also prohibit U.S. citizens and LPRs from requesting fee waivers on I-130 relative petitions on the ground that the petitioners must file affidavits of support to show that they can support the beneficiaries if they are not able to do so themselves. But such a rationale ignores the fact that given the current backlogs in the family immigration system, it may be years, sometimes even decades, before the petitioners will have to file affidavits of support for the beneficiaries. For example, a U.S. citizen mother who is petitioning for her adult son or daughter from the country of Philippines will have to wait approximately 14 years from the time that she files the I-130 petition to when the visa for her child becomes available and needs the affidavit of support.

The elimination of fee waivers for I-130 family petitions would place many U.S. citizens and LPRs in a Catch-22: They must file the I-130 petitions in order to establish their families' place in line, yet be delayed or prevented altogether from doing so because of financial difficulties that will no longer exist by the time that the visas for their families finally become available and they have to file the necessary affidavits of support.

The fee hike and the blanket ban on fee waivers on certain applications and petitions would be particularly burdensome to the roughly 12% of the Asian American community who live below the poverty level, including many refugees. The proposed fee increases will put citizenship and adjustment of status simply out of reach.

Given the speed, scope and scale of the proposed fee increase, we believe that USCIS customers must receive faster, greater, and more concrete improvements in processing times and customer service. The fee increase proposal itself does not appear to set forth any concrete targets for improvement in these areas. The USCIS press release announcing the fee increase proposal states that the fee hike, "if implemented in full by this summer," will result in "a 20 percent reduction in average application processing times by the end of fiscal year 2009." A hike in prices by an average of 66 percent now in return for a 20 percent reduction in

processing times two to three years down the road is not "they type of exceptional immigration service that our nation expects or deserves."

Finally, we believe that certain improvements which the USCIS wants to finance through the fee increase would be better addressed through the normal budget and appropriation process. For example, while we support USCIS's efforts to improve its fraud detection capacity and to modernize its business and technological infrastructure, we do not believe that immigrants and their families should bear the sole burden for these efforts. These improvements will benefit the immigration system and the national interest as a whole, and the budgetary process would be the best mechanism for Congress, USCIS, its customers, and other interested parties to determine how such functions would be optimally funded.

In conclusion, we urge USCIS to reconsider the proposed fee increase. We hope that the agency will work with immigrant communities and with Congress to develop a functioning, effective immigration system that will benefit our country.

Sincerely,

*Rev. Sophia DeWitt*

Rev. Sophia DeWitt

Refugee Ready and Elder Project Director

Fresno Interdenominational Refugee Ministries(FIRM, Inc.)



# FIRM, Inc.

## Fresno Interdenominational Refugee Ministries

1940 N. Fresno Street, Fresno, CA 93703 Website: [www.firminc.org](http://www.firminc.org)

Telephone (559) 487-1500 FAX (559) 487-1550 Email: [soulhikr@aol.com](mailto:soulhikr@aol.com)

"Sharing Christ's Love to Build Communities of Hope With New Americans"

### Executive Director

Rev. Sharon Stanley

### BOARD OFFICERS

#### Chair

Jess Negrete

#### Vice Chair

Pastor Mitt Moua

#### Secretary

Betty Higdon

#### Treasurer

Tom Davey

### ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

#### Office Manager

Lorna Bosavanh

#### Financial Manager

Richard Fuhrmann

### PROGRAMS & MINISTRIES

#### Theological Education

Dr. Stanley Friesen

#### Employment

Alan Lopes

Paula Cha

Sam Vongsanit

Tout Tou Bountapanya

Hien Vu

#### Neighborhood Ministries

Maggie Jamison

and staff

#### Slavic Kids in Focus

Andrey Kovalenko

Yelena Vaipan

Vera Shelest

#### Healthy Homes

John Bosavanh

Ilya Danilyuk

Randy Vang

#### Hmong Health Navigation

Rev. Sophia DeWitt

Youa Vang

Franklin Yang

#### Family Advocacy Services

Rev. Jay Tzerge Yang

May Vang

Tony Bounthapanya

Sara Fast

Sam Chang

#### Community Gardens

Randy Vang

#### Summerset Community

Soukan Channita, Chair

March 30, 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

**Fresno Interdenominational Refugee Ministries(FIRM, Inc.) is deeply concerned about the proposed USCIS fee increase referenced above.**

FIRM serves more than 6,500 refugees annually, many from Southeast Asia and the former Soviet Union, through a variety of programs including Employment, Health, Housing, Elder and Preschool services. **One of our primary areas of service for the last 10 years has also been ESL and Citizenship training and assistance with completing Adjustment of Status and Citizenship applications. We are pleased to have assisted hundreds of refugees to overcome language and other barriers to become American citizens.**

We are troubled by the sheer size and scope of the fee increase. USCIS plans to increase citizenship fees from \$400 (\$330 application fee plus \$70 biometric fee) to \$675 (\$595 application fee plus \$80 biometric fee), an increase of 69 percent. It would also raise fees for 37 other immigration and naturalization petitions and applications at an average increase of 66%. Furthermore, it appears that the increase will take place at once rather than being spread out over a period of time.

Rapid fee hikes of such magnitude will have a disproportionate and detrimental impact on the Asian American community, many of whom are refugees fleeing persecution, and on the broader refugee community. As the following figures reflect, Asian Americans constitute a significant portion of USCIS's customer base:

- 39% of people who naturalized in 2005 were born in Asia.
- Five of the top ten countries of birth for new U.S. citizens are Asian (Philippines, India, Vietnam, People's Republic of China, and Korea).
- 36% of people who became lawful permanent residents (LPRs) in 2005 were born in Asia.
- Five of the top ten countries of birth for new LPRs are Asian (India, China, Philippines, Vietnam, and Korea).
- Significant number of asylees and refugees came from Asian countries such as Laos (16% of refugees admitted in 2005) and China (21% of asylum granted in 2005).

*"I'm laying a FIRM foundation...no one who trusts in it will ever be disappointed."* Isaiah 28:16



**FIRM's primary populations of service include Hmong and Lao individuals, both from Laos, all of whom had to flee their homeland because of support of U.S. policies during the Vietnam war era. Their deep commitment to this country and its ideals cost them everything, yet their desire to be American citizens and fully contribute to this country is strong.**

The massive and abrupt fee increase proposed by USCIS will delay or prevent Asian Americans from becoming U.S. citizens, reuniting with their families, contributing their knowledge and skills to our economy, and settling into our society after having escaped persecution.

- A family of four LPRs who want to apply for U.S. citizenship at the same time will now have to have \$2,700 at their disposal in order to achieve their American dream together.
- A family of four who have been granted asylum in the U.S. and applying for permanent residence will now have to have \$3,620 in hand in order to apply for permanent residence.
- Furthermore, asylees applying for permanent residence will not be able to apply for fee waivers no matter how dire their financial situation may be, because USCIS intends to categorically eliminate fee waivers for I-485 applications for adjustment as a part of the fee increase.

The proposal justifies the elimination of the fee waivers for I-485s on the ground that "[a]pplicants for permanent residence must demonstrate that they can support themselves and will not become a public charge." But such rationale does not and should not apply to asylees, who are exempt from the public charge ground of inadmissibility. 8 C.F.R. §209.2(a)(1)(v).

- The proposal would also prohibit U.S. citizens and LPRs from requesting fee waivers on I-130 relative petitions on the ground that the petitioners must file affidavits of support to show that they can support the beneficiaries if they are not able to do so themselves. But such a rationale ignores the fact that given the current backlogs in the family immigration system, it may be years, sometimes even decades, before the petitioners will have to file affidavits of support for the beneficiaries. For example, a U.S. citizen mother who is petitioning for her adult son or daughter from the country of Philippines will have to wait approximately 14 years from the time that she files the I-130 petition to when the visa for her child becomes available and needs the affidavit of support.

The elimination of fee waivers for I-130 family petitions would place many U.S. citizens and LPRs in a Catch-22: They must file the I-130 petitions in order to establish their families' place in line, yet be delayed or prevented altogether from doing so because of financial difficulties that will no longer exist by the time that the visas for their families finally become available and they have to file the necessary affidavits of support.

The fee hike and the blanket ban on fee waivers on certain applications and petitions would be particularly burdensome to the roughly 12% of the Asian American community who live below the poverty level, including many refugees. The proposed fee increases will put citizenship and adjustment of status simply out of reach.

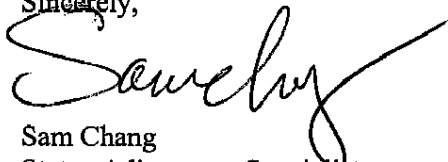
Given the speed, scope and scale of the proposed fee increase, we believe that USCIS customers must receive faster, greater, and more concrete improvements in processing times and customer service. The fee increase proposal itself does not appear to set forth any concrete targets for improvement in these areas. The USCIS press release announcing the fee increase proposal states that the fee hike, "if implemented in full by this summer," will result in "a 20 percent reduction in average application processing times by the end of fiscal year 2009." A hike in prices by an average of 66 percent now in return for a 20 percent reduction in

processing times two to three years down the road is not "they type of exceptional immigration service that our nation expects or deserves."

Finally, we believe that certain improvements which the USCIS wants to finance through the fee increase would be better addressed through the normal budget and appropriation process. For example, while we support USCIS's efforts to improve its fraud detection capacity and to modernize its business and technological infrastructure, we do not believe that immigrants and their families should bear the sole burden for these efforts. These improvements will benefit the immigration system and the national interest as a whole, and the budgetary process would be the best mechanism for Congress, USCIS, its customers, and other interested parties to determine how such functions would be optimally funded.

In conclusion, we urge USCIS to reconsider the proposed fee increase. We hope that the agency will work with immigrant communities and with Congress to develop a functioning, effective immigration system that will benefit our country.

Sincerely,



Sam Chang  
Status Adjustment Specialist  
Fresno Interdenominational Refugee Ministries(FIRM, Inc.)