

02/15/07, 2007

Director, Regulatory Management Division
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Department of Homeland Security
111 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, 3rd Floor
Washington, DC 20529

RE: DHS Docket No. USCIS-2006-0044

I, Alicia Gonzalez am writing to express my opposition of the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services' (USCIS) recent proposal to increase the initial start-up fee for the citizenship and naturalization process from \$400 to \$675. This 69% increase puts an even greater burden on hardworking and eligible legal permanent residents who wish to become United States citizens and participate fully in this great nation.

With the increase proposed by the USCIS, a family of four would be confronted with a bill amounting to \$2,700. This fee is unfair and contradictory to President Bush's recent emphasis on upholding our nation's values and tradition that welcomes and "assimilates" new arrivals. I do agree that the application process should include a "reasonable fee;" yet, I strongly believe that our system for funding immigration services in the United States should be a partnership and not a hindrance on the hardworking residents that wish to become American Citizens. In the past, Congress has appropriated monies to assist the USCIS in facing challenges such as its application processing backlog. It is now time for the USCIS to act again. **The USCIS must act as a leader and ask President Bush and Congress to include more appropriation funds in the federal budget.**

Currently, there are more than 2.3 million legal permanent residents in California, and about 8 million nationwide, who are eligible to apply for U.S. Citizenship. Statistics further show that about half of those who are eligible to naturalize are Latino. A recent study conducted by the NALEO Education Fund found that the three major barriers to naturalization are: the lack of adequate and reliable information, exam preparation (language) and cost. Concurrently, U.S. Census data tells us that about three out of four Mexican and Central American non-citizen households (74%) have annual incomes of less than \$25,000. Thus, increasing the initial start-up fee for the citizenship and naturalization process will only result in a devastating and unjust barrier for millions of residents pursuing the American Dream. For these reasons, I strongly oppose the USCIS' proposed fee increase.

Thank you,

Alicia Gonzalez
(signature)

Address:

1342 S TOWER S SANTA ANA CA

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