Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

November 20, 2026

The Honorable Joseph B. Edlow
Director, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Department of Homeland Security
5900 Capital Gateway Drive
Camp Springs, MD 20746

Dear Director Edlow:

We write to raise serious concerns regarding the current state of the processing of naturalization applications (USCIS Form N-400, Application for Naturalization) pending with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services at the Baltimore Field Office.

On June 5, 2026, a federal judge ruled that the policies set forth in U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' (USCIS) Policy Memorandum 602-0194, which halted the processing of key immigration benefit adjudications, were unlawful and vacated them nationwide.[1] As a result, USCIS is legally obligated to resume standard processing of all applications that were previously paused and applications can no longer be arbitrarily held due to the applicant's nationality.

Despite vacating these policies, many naturalization applications continue to experience a substantial delay, with no information on a timeline for final adjudication or oath ceremony scheduling. Since the aforementioned ruling in *Dorcas v. USCIS*, our offices have received substantial outreach from constituents whose naturalization applications continue to be excessively stalled and subject to increasing processing times. A recent review of USCIS's quarterly data revealed that the agency has decided 73% fewer naturalization cases over the past year—the lowest level over the past decade.[2] Press Unpause, a grassroots organization that closely tracked the impacts of these policies, estimated that over 2 million filed applications were subject to USCIS's adjudicative hold over the almost 7 months that it was in place.[3] That is 2 million people whose lives were put on hold, which led to compounding consequences across employment, finances, health, housing, family, and legal status for so many.[4]

These delays have disproportionately impacted Marylanders. Between June 1, 2026, and October 22, 2026, processing times for naturalization applications at USCIS's Baltimore Field Office have nearly doubled: increasing from about 8 months to a year to a range of 15 to more than 20 months – more than a year and a half. The significant rise in average processing times for naturalization applications at the Baltimore Field Office is deeply concerning, especially when

---

[1] U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Newsroom, "Court Order on Hold Policies," June 12, 2026. https://www.uscis.gov/newsroom/alerts/court-order-on-hold-policies

[2] U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Immigration and Citizenship Data. https://www.uscis.gov/tools/reports-and-studies/immigration-and-citizenship-data?topic_id%5B%5D=33692&ddt_mon=&ddt_yr=2025&query=&items_per_page=10

[3] Press Unpause, USCIS Pause Tracker. https://uscis-pause-tracker.com/

[4] Adjudication Impact Report, "Economic and Human Cost of the USCIS Adjudication Pause," July 2026. Economic and Human Cost of the USCIS Adjudication Pause | USCIS Adjudication Pause Research

compared to other large USCIS Field Offices nationally. The Baltimore Field Office currently adjudicates naturalization applications slower than major Field Offices in New York City (10 to 12.5 months), Orlando (13.5 to 18.5 months), Miami (10 to 14.5 months), Dallas (13 to 16 months) and Los Angeles (10.5 to 14 months). Meanwhile, similar cases in the neighboring office in Washington, DC are adjudicated within a range of 11.5 to 14 months on average.[5]

Also concerning are the drastic changes in adjudication rates and decisions. As of September 8, 2026, USCIS quarterly data from Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) reflected that the denial rate of naturalization applications at the Baltimore Field Office increased fivefold: rising from 7% in the second quarter (Q2) to 35% in the third quarter (Q3). This means that more than one in three applications adjudicated during this quarter was denied, compared to less than one in ten previously. It's also a roughly sixfold increase over naturalization application denial rates in the previous fiscal year (FY25). Further, the Baltimore Field Office adjudicated only 391 naturalization applications in Q3, compared with 1,178 in Q2 which is a 67% decrease from an already low level. This amounts to only five adjudications per business day, approximately. In direct comparison to previous years, during Q2 of FY25, 5,758 applications were adjudicated, while in Q3, 5,433 applications were adjudicated. This reflects an 80% and 93% decrease, respectively, in comparable quarters from FY25 to FY26. There are now nearly 17,000 Marylanders awaiting decisions on their naturalization applications.[6]

Finally, the cancellation of oath ceremonies—the last step to becoming an American citizen, when individuals swear their loyalty to the United States and receive their Certificate of Naturalization—have caused significant delays for applicants who were vetted, received full approval, and passed their required citizenship exams. American citizenship bestows critical rights and responsibilities upon those who earn it, including the right to vote and the responsibility of serving as a juror in our justice system. Needless postponement unfairly withholds those important rights and responsibilities from those who have earned them.

As a nation of immigrants, we believe that individuals who navigate our legal immigration system in good faith deserve timely processing of their applications. A prolonged backlog of naturalization applications after a federal court directed USCIS to resume standard processing of these applications undermines the rule of law and the integrity of our country's legal immigration system.

We urge USCIS to take immediate corrective action to address the extraordinary decline in the adjudication of naturalization applications at the Baltimore Field Office, examine the alarming increase in denial rates, and ensure that approved applicants are promptly scheduled for oath ceremonies. **We request a written response within 30 days outlining the specific steps USCIS is taking to restore timely adjudications, address the growing backlog, and establish a reasonable timeline for returning the Baltimore Field Office to normal processing operations.**

---

[5] U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service, Case Processing Times. https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times

[6] U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Immigration and Citizenship Data. https://www.uscis.gov/tools/reports-and-studies/immigration-and-citizenship-data?topic_id%5B%5D=33692&ddt_mon=&ddt_yr=2025&query=&items_per_page=10

The thousands of Marylanders who have fulfilled their obligations under our immigration laws deserve more than indefinite delays. They deserve a fair, timely, and transparent path to citizenship. We expect USCIS to fulfill its responsibilities accordingly.

Sincerely,

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

Angela D. Alsobrooks
United States Senator

Steny H. Hoyer
Member of Congress

Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress

Kweisi Mfume
Member of Congress

Glenn F. Ivey
Member of Congress

April McClain Delaney
Member of Congress

Sarah Elfreth
Member of Congress

Johnny Olszewski, Jr.
Member of Congress