

The Issue: USCIS Needs Resources to Encourage Immigrants to Become Citizens

In the last decade, the government has become increasingly aware of the value of speeding the integration of immigrants into our society. Beginning with the Administration of George W. Bush and continuing with the current Administration, the Office of Citizenship has led an effort to encourage immigrants to acquire citizenship and to assist them in the process.

Currently, the Office of Citizenship is in the midst of an Immigrant Integration Initiative that includes competitive grants to non-profit partners that have experience in reaching out to legal permanent resident immigrants, encouraging them to become citizens, and assisting immigrants with their citizenship applications. The Initiative also includes a Citizenship Public Awareness Initiative, that will use advertising and the Web to make immigrants more aware of the citizenship application process and the rights and responsibilities that come with citizenship. The agency is also expanding its teaching resources to help immigrants prepare for the citizenship test.

A Modest Investment

In recent years, Congress has provided funding for these initiatives. In Fiscal Year 2010, Congress appropriated \$11 million for the Immigrant Integration Initiative. From that total, the Office of Citizenship awarded more than \$8 million to organizations in 27 states and the District of Columbia for the purpose of helping legal immigrants prepare for citizenship or to help organizations build capacity to help legal immigrants prepare for citizenship. In Fiscal Year 2011, Congress again provided \$11 million for the Immigrant Integration Initiative.

In its Fiscal Year 2012 budget, the Administration requested \$19.75 million for an expanded Immigrant Integration Initiative and to pay for the operations of the Office of Citizenship (which does not actually process citizenship applications). Without Congressional appropriations, the government's investment in encouraging immigrants to become Americans must be paid for by placing a surtax on naturalization applications and applications unrelated to naturalization.

The House Appropriations Bill: A Failure to Invest in Tomorrow's New Citizens

On May 24th, the House Appropriations Committee marked up the Homeland Security spending bill for the Government's Fiscal Year 2012. The Committee rejected the Administration's request to use general revenue funds for immigrant integration, and specified that immigrant integration efforts must be paid for out of funds collected from application fees.

Immigrant integration does not just benefit immigrants, but our nation as well. Our democracy is strengthened when eligible immigrants become citizens and participate fully in our society and political system. The modest government investment in immigrant integration requested by the Administration should be supported.