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Green Card and Naturalization Applicants May Need to Travel Farther for Personal Interviews

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Law Firm: Fragomen, Del Rey, Bernsen & Loewy, LLP - Office

At a glance

To alleviate growing backlogs, USCIS will transfer some green card and naturalization cases to agency field offices with fewer cases.

The change means that some applicants will be interviewed outside of their normal USCIS jurisdiction.

USCIS may allow applicants to reschedule interviews in the original jurisdiction, but this could increase application processing times.

The issue

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) plans to reassign some green card and naturalization cases from local field offices with large backlogs to those with fewer cases. According to the agency, the change is intended to decrease the disparity in case processing times based on USCIS office location. USCIS practice had been to schedule green card and naturalization interviews at a local office nearest to the applicant's home address.

A closer look

Processing times for adjustment of status (green card) and naturalization cases have increased in recent years, partly due to the addition of a personal interview requirement for all employment-based adjustment of status applications that began in October 2017. Metropolitan areas appear to be most affected. Some USCIS field offices had already begun shifting casework to field offices outside of the applicant's normal jurisdiction in response to these backlogs. Today's announcement confirms that USCIS will now implement this approach on a nationwide basis.

What it means for green card and naturalization applicants

Though the processing change is intended to decrease backlogs and wait times, foreign nationals and their family members may need to make additional travel plans and arrange time away from work or school in order to appear for their interview at a more distant field office. USCIS may honor requests to reschedule interviews to a field office closer to the applicant's residence, but the applicant would lose the potential benefit of a shorter case processing time. Applicants will still be scheduled to have their biometrics collected at the USCIS Application Support Center nearest to their home address, even if the interview will take place elsewhere.

Fragomen is closely following this issue and will provide updates as USCIS releases further details.

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