

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

October 20, 2022

District Director Greg Collett
Baltimore Field Office
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
3701 Koppers Street
Halethorpe, MD 21227

Dear Director Collett,

As members of the Maryland Congressional Delegation, we write to you in your capacity as District Director of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Baltimore Field Office (USCIS Baltimore Field Office) with regard to the office's average service times and responsiveness. Declines on both fronts in recent years are negatively affecting the people of Maryland, and we are concerned that processing times for the critical services the office provides lag significantly behind other comparable field offices across the country. We are committed to understanding the issues facing the USCIS Baltimore Field Office and working with you to better assist the constituents we serve.

We recognize that the past few years have been particularly challenging for USCIS nationwide. The agency has had to work through considerable changes in policies and priorities while also dealing with the implications of COVID-19 and managing increases in application receipt and humanitarian-based needs. During public meetings and congressional briefings, the agency has cited staffing and attrition as a leading challenge. We appreciate that USCIS Director Ur Jaddou has made it a priority to reduce application processing times and backlogs.

There are significant delays in processing numerous immigration benefits adjudicated by the USCIS Baltimore Field Office, such as family, employment and asylum-based I-485 applications, I-130 petitions, and I-751 applications. We applaud USCIS's effort to redistribute the workload of I-485s nationally across field offices to create more uniform processing times for employment-based I-485 applications. However, public data suggests that the USCIS Baltimore Field Office's processing times lag considerably behind most other field offices across the country. Despite the aforementioned progress on employment-based I-485s, the USCIS Baltimore Field Office is currently processing most such applications in 31.5 months compared to 20 months in the Chicago field office and 19.5 months in the Los Angeles field offices. Additionally, the processing time for family-based I-485s is 34.5 months, compared to 15.5 months in Chicago and 18.5 months in Los Angeles.¹

¹ <https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/>

These delays have real, devastating consequences on the lives of individuals, families, and employers in Maryland. Delayed processing times negatively affect our constituents' employment and financial welfare. Marylanders are regularly denied promotions, transfers, or growth opportunities because they have not yet received the benefits for which they applied. Delays create financial and emotional stress for the families and communities of applicants.

A related concern is the deterioration of the USCIS Baltimore Field Office's responsiveness to our constituents and their advocates. This trend pre-dated the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic but has certainly increased during that time period. Responses to constituents and their advocates come slower, if they come at all. When provided, responses are generic and do not respond substantively to the situation presented. We are especially concerned about responsiveness to emergencies. Our offices are often contacted by constituents experiencing life-or-death emergencies with immediate need for travel authorization. These constituents contact USCIS's National Call Center and are advised to await a phone call from the local field office; a call that they never receive.

These conditions have caused an increasing number of applicants to seek assistance from our congressional staffs, who themselves report decreased responsiveness from the USCIS Baltimore Field Office. Congressional staff often need to contact agency staff by phone to discuss sensitive cases or time-sensitive matters, but their calls are frequently not answered or returned. Further, USCIS Baltimore Field Office staff previously provided a substantive, unique explanation of reasons for delays when a case exceeded normal processing times. That information helped provide context to constituents, aid their understanding as to the status of their application(s), and mitigate concerns, follow-up questions, and repeat inquiries on the same topic. However, our staff now often receive only a generic or form response in such cases. This lack of meaningful engagement frustrates our constituents and leaves them with an upsetting lack of information about decisions that are fundamental to their livelihoods. It also restricts the ability of our staff to serve their important role of prioritizing cases, identifying procedural errors, and educating the public about their rights under our laws and regulations.

As Maryland's Congressional delegation, we value our long history of collaboration with your office to best serve our constituents. We look forward to working together to reverse recent trends. Toward that end, we respectfully request that the USCIS Baltimore Field Office implement the steps below. We ask that you respond to the following questions and requests in writing by November 21, 2022.

1. What issues, aside from staffing, are causing these delays? What, if any congressional action is needed to address them?
2. Develop and share a clear and date-specific plan for improving processing times to at least the level of field offices in comparable metropolitan centers. Please address the specific plans for all types of I-485s, I-130, and I-751 applications.
3. Schedule quarterly Congressional meetings with USCIS Baltimore Field Office leadership.

4. Ensure the existence of a dedicated phone line for Congressional staff for urgent and sensitive matters that provides responses within 24-48 hours. Such a line is offered at most other USCIS field offices and service centers.

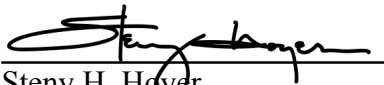
Sincerely,



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



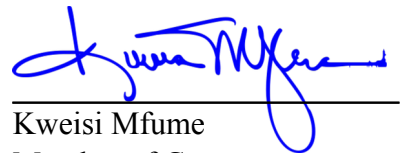
Steny H. Hoyer
Member of Congress



C. A. Dutch Ruppertsberger
Member of Congress



John P. Sarbanes
Member of Congress



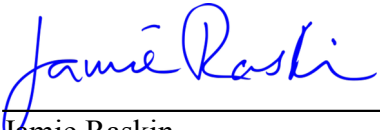
Kweisi Mfume
Member of Congress



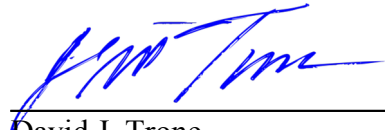
Andy Harris, M.D.
Member of Congress



Anthony G. Brown
Member of Congress



Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress



David J. Trone
Member of Congress

Cc: The Honorable Ur M. Jaddou, Director, USCIS