

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

February 7, 2018

The Honorable L. Francis Cissna
Director
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
20 Massachusetts Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20529

Dear Director Cissna:

We write regarding the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' (USCIS) management of the Electronic Immigration System (ELIS), a case management system intended to allow USCIS to process certain immigration benefit requests electronically. We appreciate your attention to this matter.

In January 2017, the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General (DHS OIG) recommended that USCIS stop its plans to reinstate the use of the ELIS.¹ In March 2017, the DHS OIG again recommended that USCIS refrain from using ELIS due to reports of 200,000 approved applicants with missing green cards.²

In July 2017, the Committee sought information from DHS and USCIS about the problems with ELIS.³ USCIS briefed Committee staff on its corrective action plan and stated that the agency was taking the necessary steps to correct previous issues.⁴

In November 2017, the DHS OIG released another report about ELIS's inability to automate the N-400 Application for Naturalization.⁵ The report noted that "[t]he problems in N-

¹ Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General, *DHS OIG Urgently Recommends USCIS Halt Plans to Use the Electronic Immigration System (ELIS) for Naturalization Application Processing* (Jan. 23, 2017) (www.oig.dhs.gov/assets/pr/2017/oigpr-012317.pdf); Government Accountability Office, *Immigration Benefits System: Significant Risks in USCIS's Efforts to Develop its Adjudication and Case Management System* (GAO-17-486T) (Mar. 16, 2017).

² House Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency, *Immigration Benefits Vetting: Examining Critical Weaknesses in USCIS Systems*, 115th Cong. (Mar. 16, 2017).

³ Letter from Senator Ron Johnson to Secretary John Kelly, Department of Homeland Security (July 28, 2017); Letter from Senator Claire McCaskill to Acting Director James McCament, U.S. Customs and Immigration Services (July 10, 2017).

⁴ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Briefing with Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Staff (July 26, 2017).

400 automation can be attributed to poor program management practices, which have continued since prior ELIS releases.”⁶ The DHS OIG found that, due to problems with ELIS, approximately 200 applicants became citizens before USCIS conducted proper background checks.⁷

To understand the continued issues with ELIS, we request that USCIS provide a briefing to the Committee staff and include the following information:

1. Which USCIS officials had management and oversight responsibilities related to ELIS? Has the performance of ELIS been a factor in managers’ performance reviews?
2. Please explain how will USCIS ensure it will award citizenship to no further applicants without proper vetting.
3. Please provide the following data relating to the 200 applicants who DHS OIG identified as improperly naturalized before vetting:
 - a. When USCIS became aware of the incomplete background checks;
 - b. When USCIS completed the background checks; and
 - c. How many applications would have been denied had the background check been completed.

Please provide this briefing and documents at your earliest convenience but no later than February 28, 2018.

If you have any questions about this request, please contact Melissa Egred with Chairman Johnson’s staff at (202) 224-4751 or Hannah Berner with Ranking Member McCaskill’s staff at (202) 224-2627. Thank you for your assistance with this matter.

Sincerely,


Ron Johnson
Chairman


Claire McCaskill
Ranking Member

⁵ Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General, *USCIS Has Been Unsuccessful in Automating Naturalization Benefits Delivery* (OIG-18-23) (Nov. 30, 2017).

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*