



**Seattle**  
Office of Immigrant  
and Refugee Affairs

# Challenges to Citizenship

How the federal government is undermining  
the citizenship application process

Cuc Vu, Christina Guros, and Meghan Kelly-Stallings

July 10, 2019



**City of Seattle**

# Changes to USCIS' Mission Statement

Pre-Trump:

## Focus on Services and Benefits

"USCIS secures America's promise **as a nation of immigrants** by providing accurate and useful information to our customers, **granting immigration and citizenship benefits**, promoting an awareness and understanding of **citizenship**, and ensuring the integrity of our immigration system."

Post-Trump:

## Focus on Enforcement

"U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services administers the nation's lawful immigration system, safeguarding its integrity and promise by efficiently and **fairly adjudicating requests for immigration benefits while protecting Americans, securing the homeland, and honoring our values.**"





# Seattle is a national leader on naturalization

## New Citizen Campaign



Monthly clinics led by community partners



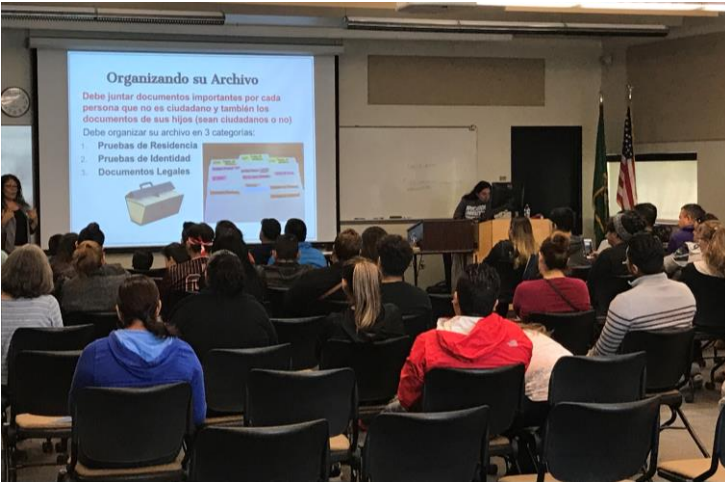
Helping 300-400 legal permanent residents each year



Collaborative capacity-building and advocacy

# Seattle is a national leader on naturalization

## New Citizen Program



Legal assistance to public benefits recipients and low-income Seattle residents



Helping close to 600 people/year submit N-400s, (over 95% of applicants submit fee waiver applications)



Funded by City general fund, DSHS-Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance, and Seattle Housing Authority



# Seattle is a national leader on naturalization



City's total investment in naturalization assistance = more than \$1 million annually



More than 1,500 people served per year (including intake screening, referrals, citizenship classes, and ongoing legal services for N-400 applicants)

# Our Local Partners

Asian Counseling and Referral Service  
Catholic Immigration Legal Services  
Chinese Information and Service Center  
Entre Hermanos  
Horn of Africa Services  
International Rescue Committee  
Jewish Family Service  
Korean Community Service Center  
Literacy Source  
Multicultural Self-Sufficiency Movement

Neighborhood House  
Northwest Immigrant Rights Project  
OneAmerica  
Refugee Women's Alliance  
Sea Mar Community Health Centers  
Somali Family Safety Task Force  
South Park Information and Resource Center  
St. James Immigrant Assistance  
The West African Community Council  
Ukrainian Community Center of Washington



# Changes Under Trump - National



## Implemented

- Notice to Appear memo
- Request for Evidence (RFE) / Notice of Intent to Deny (NOID) memo
- Additional requirements for Forms N-600 and N-565

## In Notice and Comment Process

- Changes to Form N-648 (Disability Waiver)
- Changes to Form N-400 (Naturalization Application)
- Changes to Form N-445 (Oath Ceremony)
- Changes to public charge – *chilling effect*



# Local Impacts



- Increased processing times – **more than 16 months for Seattle**
- Read *all* application questions (20 pages)
- Scrutiny of public benefits recipients
- Use of tablets during interviews
- Multi-hour waits for interviews
- Relocation of interviews\*
  - Applicants south and west of Seattle required to travel to Portland
  - Applicants east of Seattle required to travel Yakima

*\*USCIS reserving right to send anyone to different field offices*



# What does this look like?



A Chinese Information and Service Center client was recently turned away from her oath ceremony.

# What does this look like?



"All the cases are harder."

Abdi Jama  
Program Manager  
Catholic Immigration Legal Services

# Major Changes on the Horizon

## National

- Changes to Form I-912 (fee waiver) – in Notice and Comment process since September 2018, anticipated adoption in 2019
- Changes to fee schedule – rumored for notice and comment to begin late summer 2019
- Fee waiver elimination – rumored for notice and comment to begin late summer 2019



# Impact on clients



## "Second wall" A delay and deter tactic

- Financial hardship (filing fees, travel costs)
- Increased risks to applying for citizenship



# Impact on service providers



- Constant onslaught
  - Adapting and establishing new best practices
  - Increasing capacity without additional funds
  - Planning for disaster, vicarious trauma
- Providers spending much more time to serve each client, which is a substantial increase in the average cost per application.
- City-funded service providers have continually stepped up to tirelessly organize, prepare, and advocate for clients.





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