



CONGRESSIONAL HISPANIC CAUCUS
Michelle Lujan Grisham | Chairwoman
115TH CONGRESS
March 21, 2018

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

Dear Director Cissna:

We write to request more information about the creation of a new division at the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) that reportedly seeks to “police” its caseworkers. According to the Washington Post, USCIS is reassigning staff members to this new division, named the Organization of Professional Responsibility, to investigate “cases involving fraud, waste, abuse, or misconduct by USCIS employees.” We are concerned that USCIS is considering this new internal office in light of the harmful changes USCIS has already proposed to lawful immigration numbers and to its mission statement. We are also concerned that this new oversight division has not been widely disclosed among employees and contractors, and that this new division seeks to root out those who do not wholeheartedly agree with the Trump administration’s hardline immigration views.

As you know, USCIS plays a critical role in the nation’s immigration system. USCIS processes various benefits for thousands of petitioners a day and decides which individuals can obtain immigration relief. At a time when the Trump administration has shown a blatant disregard for immigrant communities, it is imperative that USCIS, and its employees, remain impartial and give each application due consideration. USCIS has a duty to assist all immigrants who satisfy the application requirements.

As members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, we have a stake in the policies USCIS adopts. These policies directly affect our constituents and we have a right to keep them well informed of any changes to the agency. Therefore, please provide written answers to the following questions at your earliest convenience and provide a Member-level briefing on the Hill at your earliest convenience:

- Why is the creation of the Organization of Professional Responsibility necessary? Please describe, in detail, the Organization’s purpose and how its functions are intended to rectify issues that were identified in the 2016 Office of Inspector General report. In answering this question, please provide a list of interim policy changes that will be executed through or with the facilitation of this new entity.
- What guidance, if any, have you shared to USCIS employees about the Organization of Professional Responsibility? According to the Washington Post article, employees seem to be unaware about this change in order and policy at the USCIS. Arguably, these conditions seem to be consistent with the issues that the OIG identified previously, analyzed and provided recommendations for its remedy (p. 8, 9, 22)¹. Please describe, in detail, how your agency is communicating this policy with current employees.

¹ <https://www.oig.dhs.gov/assets/Mgmt/2016/OIG-16-96-IQO-Jun16.pdf>

- How are USCIS employees to be evaluated under this new office? Please list the exact criteria, including any intended quantitative or qualitative measures this new entity will employ. How will this differ from current/previous methods?
- How does USCIS define what it means for an employee to be “too lenient” or “forgiving” on immigration benefit applications? Please list the exact criteria. Please provide a list of intended qualitative or quantitative metrics that your agency will use to evaluate such assessments.
- If a caseworker is found to violate the parameters of the office, will they be reprimanded? If so, how will they be reprimanded? What recourse do employees have?

Thank you for your attention to the important matter. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Joaquin Castro
First Vice Chair



Michelle Lujan Grisham
Chair



Pete Aguilar
Whip



Ruben Gallego
Second Vice Chair



Adriano Espaillat
Freshman Representative



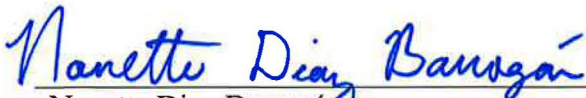
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Member of Congress



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Member of Congress



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Member of Congress



Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress



J. Luis Correa
Member of Congress




Ben Ray Luján
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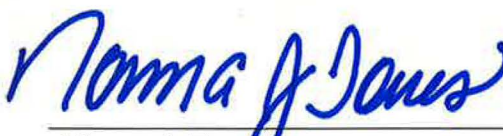


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**U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services**

April 16, 2018

The Honorable Michelle Lujan Grisham
Chairwoman
Congressional Hispanic Caucus
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Lujan Grisham:

Thank you for your March 21, 2018 letter. We appreciate the opportunity to address your concerns that U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is reportedly creating a new division to monitor employees who adjudicate immigration benefit requests.

Contrary to recent news reporting, USCIS is not creating an oversight division to monitor employees perceived as too lenient with adjudicating immigration benefit requests. These reports are absolutely false. Senior career civil servants within the agency proposed to establish an Office of Professional Responsibility, which would combine pre-existing USCIS functions into one office. The proposal was first developed in 2016 in response to the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General Report, Oversight Review of the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, Investigations Division (June 6, 2016, OIG-16-96-IQO). Some employees with expertise in the related functions were aware of the potential consolidation into one office because their advice was sought out in formulating the proposal. At this time, however, agency leadership and I are currently reviewing the proposal, and no final decisions have been made. I would formally make an announcement to USCIS staff only if a final decision is made to establish an Office of Professional Responsibility.

The role of an Office of Professional Responsibility—something many federal agencies have—is to investigate waste, fraud and abuse, ensure the agency is not vulnerable to exploitation by criminal or foreign elements, and confirm proper audits are in place.

When I was appointed director of USCIS, I outlined several priorities that reflect my guiding principles for the agency. These principles focus on fairness, lawfulness, efficiency, ensuring the integrity of the immigration system, and safeguarding the homeland. The proposal to establish an Office of Professional Responsibility reflects those guiding principles as well as the core responsibility of the agency, which is to serve the interests of the American public by overseeing and ensuring the integrity of the immigration system and safeguarding the homeland.

The Honorable Michelle Lujan Grisham

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Thank you again for your letter and interest in this important matter. The co-signers of your letter will receive a separate, identical response. Should you require any additional assistance or to schedule a briefing, please have your staff contact the USCIS Office of Legislative Affairs at (202) 272-1940.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "LFC", is positioned above the printed name.

L. Francis Cissna
Director