



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

August 2, 2016

Cecelia Levin
Senior Policy Counsel
ASISTA
P.O. Box 12
Suffield, CT 06078

Dear Ms. Levin:

Thank you for your May 16, 2016 letter regarding your concerns about the current processing times for U visa petitions. Since its inception, the U nonimmigrant program has strived to meet the goals of strengthening the ability of law enforcement to investigate and prosecute qualifying crimes, and protecting victims of crimes who have suffered substantial mental or physical abuse. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has met the 10,000 annual U visa cap every fiscal year (FY) since 2010. From 2014-2016, USCIS met the cap within the first few months of each fiscal year. We understand you and your clients' frustrations as well as the hardships that the statutory cap may cause. Recognizing the vulnerability of this population of petitioners, USCIS implemented the waiting list process in FY 2010 to allow eligible petitioners to receive deferred action and employment authorization while they wait for a visa number to become available.

Over the past several years, USCIS has experienced a steady increase in the number of U visa petitions received, which has contributed to an increase in the overall processing time. We assure you that USCIS remains committed to the timely review and adjudication of U nonimmigrant petitions. USCIS strives to balance newly filed petitions, waiting list adjudications, and pending principal and derivative U nonimmigrant status adjudications in a manner that will best serve the overall program.

The number of U nonimmigrant status petitions received by USCIS has increased significantly over the past several years from about 11,000 in FY 2009 to more than 52,000 in FY 2015. In December 2015, after USCIS reached the FY 2016 statutory cap, we quickly shifted resources at the Vermont Service Center (VSC) to adjudicate petitions for derivatives of those principal petitioners who had just been granted U nonimmigrant status. Once the VSC adjudicated the petitions for derivatives, it then focused on addressing backlogs within the U nonimmigrant status program, including petitions for derivatives who filed after the principal received U nonimmigrant status in a prior fiscal year. USCIS continues to prioritize petitions by receipt date. Although it may appear that there has been a delay in the return to adjudicating incoming petitions that are pending waiting list consideration, USCIS continues to review

petitions on a “first-in, first-out” basis. In addition, USCIS receives and responds to the more than 6,600 customer service inquiries received each month.

USCIS is exploring many strategies to address current processing times. In July 2016, the Nebraska Service Center (NSC) joined the VSC in processing Form I-918, Petition for U Nonimmigrant Status. Sharing this workload between service centers will provide flexibility as USCIS works toward improving processing times, efficiency, and customer service to this vulnerable population. USCIS is implementing the transition in phases which will allow the NSC to develop the necessary expertise with support and guidance from the VSC, ensuring continuity of adjudication. The NSC was chosen to partner with the VSC in sharing the U nonimmigrant workload for a number of reasons, including its extensive background with other humanitarian programs. Sharing the U nonimmigrant petition workload between the service centers has the potential to improve the U nonimmigrant petition process for thousands of petitioners and their family members.

Thank you again for your letter and interest in this important issue. Please share this information with the organizations that co-signed your letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "León Rodríguez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "León" and last name "Rodríguez" clearly distinguishable.

León Rodríguez
Director