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For Information Contact:
Public Affairs (202) 254-4100

USCIS Automation of Immigration Benefits Processing Remains Ineffective

A new Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General (DHS OIG) report concludes that U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' (USCIS) ongoing efforts to automate benefits processing remain ineffective. Until USCIS makes all of the needed improvements, the agency will remain unable to achieve its workload processing, customer service, and national security goals.

"USCIS Automation of Immigration Benefits Processing Remains Ineffective" is the DHS OIG's sixth report since 2005 on USCIS' IT modernization attempts that were hampered by repeated delays. Today's report focuses on the USCIS Electronic Immigration System (ELIS), intended to provide integrated online case management rather than the paper-based system currently in use.

The DHS OIG's report concludes that although USCIS deployed ELIS in May 2012, to date only two of approximately 90 types of immigration benefits are available for online customer filing, accounting for less than 10 percent of the agency's total workload. The current approach has also not ensured stakeholder involvement, performance metrics, system testing, or user support needed to be effective.

USCIS now estimates that it will take three more years—over four years longer than estimated—and an additional $1 billion to automate all benefit types as expected.

"USCIS currently works with a paper-based system that is more suited to an office environment from the 1950s rather than 2016," said Inspector General Roth. "While the agency acknowledges that its continued dependence on paper files is inefficient, little progress has been made to transform to an automated processing environment. Operational inefficiencies and risks will continue to exist until USCIS makes the recommended improvements, which must be a priority."