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United States General Accounting Office

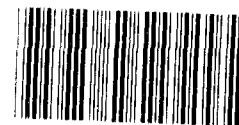
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Fact Sheet for the Honorable  
Charles E. Schumer,  
House of Representatives

April 1986

# NATURALIZED CITIZENSHIP

## Processing Time for Applications at INS' Brooklyn, New York, Office



130019

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**UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548**

GENERAL GOVERNMENT  
DIVISION

April 30, 1986

B-222789

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer  
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Schumer:

This fact sheet responds to your December 27, 1985, request for information about the federal naturalization process for granting U.S. citizenship to aliens. You were specifically concerned about the time the Immigration and Naturalization Service's (INS) Brooklyn, New York, office takes to process aliens' applications to become U.S. citizens compared to the processing time in other INS offices. On March 5, 1986, we briefed your office on the results of our work. The following summarizes the information we presented at that briefing.

Aliens who want to become naturalized U.S. citizens must first submit an application to INS. After reviewing the application and interviewing the alien to determine if all citizenship requirements have been met, INS will make a recommendation to a federal or state naturalization court that has authority to grant citizenship to aliens. If the court agrees that the alien is qualified, the alien is requested to appear in court to swear an oath of allegiance to the United States and receive the citizenship certificate.

To determine the time the naturalization process takes at the INS Brooklyn office, we reviewed 250 selected case files for aliens INS had scheduled for interview in February 1986. From these case files, we calculated the average number of months from the date of the alien's application for citizenship to the scheduled date of the INS interview. For comparison purposes, we also performed this analysis for 143 cases at INS' Manhattan, New York, office. During February 1986, we telephoned officials at other INS offices--Los Angeles, Miami, Chicago, and San Francisco--to obtain comparable processing times. INS officials at these offices also provided the number of citizenship applications received for fiscal years 1984 and 1985 and the staffing and funding levels for the naturalization program.

As discussed with your office, we are not providing the staffing and funding level data received from the above offices

because comparable data was not readily available. For example, the use of computer-assisted processing systems varied among the offices making comparisons invalid. Also, we did not attempt to determine what actions the courts could take, if any, to shorten the time between the INS interview and the final court ceremony.

PROCESSING TIME IN BROOKLYN IS  
LONGER THAN IN OTHER INS OFFICES

The INS Brooklyn office takes longer to process aliens' applications for U.S. citizenship than the Manhattan and other INS offices included in our survey. Reasons for the longer processing time at the Brooklyn office are difficult to determine. However, INS New York district officials attribute this condition, at least in part, to (1) the absence of a computer-assisted processing system; (2) a larger increase in applications from fiscal year 1984 to fiscal year 1985 than experienced by other INS offices included in our survey; and (3) limited office space, which precluded additional staff being assigned to process the increased number of applications.

Although neither the Manhattan nor the Brooklyn office had a computer-assisted application processing system, the processing time in Manhattan was about 4 months compared to about 7.5 months in Brooklyn. INS officials attributed the difference in processing times to the higher staff to workload ratio in Manhattan.

The comparative processing times for the INS offices included in our review are shown below.

INS Processing Time From Receipt of Application  
to Interview as of February 1986

	<u>Months</u>
New York	
Manhattan	4.25
Brooklyn	7.50
Los Angeles	7.00
San Francisco	4.00
Miami	2.00
Chicago	2.00

To determine the approximate time the naturalization process took at INS' New York offices prior to February 1986, we reviewed 86 case files in the Brooklyn office and 68 case files in the Manhattan office for selected aliens requested to appear

in court in December 1985. The average processing time from receipt of application to interview was 9.2 months for the Brooklyn office and 4 months for the Manhattan office.

The INS offices with the shortest processing time--Miami, Chicago, and San Francisco--installed computer-assisted processing systems in April 1985, October 1984, and February 1985, respectively. The Los Angeles INS office, whose processing time approached that experienced in Brooklyn, had installed a computer system in December 1985. As of February 1986, the Los Angeles office was dealing with a backlog of applications accumulated while the system was being installed.

The New York district, which includes the Manhattan and Brooklyn offices, has been particularly affected by an increasing number of naturalization applications. New York's applications increased 50 percent between fiscal years 1984 and 1985, as the following table shows.

Change in Application Volume  
for Selected INS Offices

	<u>FY 84</u>	<u>FY 85</u>	<u>Percent increase (+)</u> <u>or decrease (-)</u>
New York	48,352	72,565	+50
Los Angeles	41,327	58,333	+41
San Francisco	45,652	37,519	-18
Miami	48,063	27,930	-42
Chicago	30,614	26,854	-12
All others	<u>156,350</u>	<u>171,739</u>	+10
Total	<u>370,358</u>	<u>394,940</u>	+ 7

INS' Brooklyn office processed about 64 percent of all the applications received by the New York district in fiscal year 1985. Similar data for fiscal year 1984 was not readily available.

BROOKLYN OFFICE TAKING ACTION  
TO REDUCE PROCESSING TIME

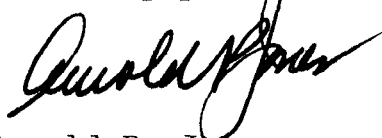
INS district officials told us that several events are underway that could reduce Brooklyn's processing time for citizenship applications.

- The number of applications received in the New York district during the first 4 months of fiscal year 1986 was about 20 percent less than for a similar period in fiscal year 1985.
- In 1986, INS plans to move its Brooklyn office to a new location with more office space and assign five additional persons to process applications.
- The Brooklyn office is converting to a computer-assisted processing system that should be completed in April 1986.

INS has established a goal of 4 months for processing alien citizenship claims from date of application to date of INS interview. The Brooklyn office was not achieving this goal at the time of our survey. Whether the actions planned for the Brooklyn office will result in its reaching the processing goal remains to be seen.

As agreed with your office, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this fact sheet until 30 days after it is issued. At that time, we will send copies to interested parties, and make copies available to others upon request. If you have any questions regarding this fact sheet, please call me on 275-8389.

Sincerely yours,



Arnold P. Jones  
Senior Associate Director

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