



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **INS Achieves 2-Year Naturalization Program Goals** *Agency Expands Progress to Other Benefits and Customer Service*

WASHINGTON – Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) Commissioner Doris Meissner today announced that the agency has met its naturalization program goals by completing more than 2.5 million naturalization applications for the period FY 1999 – FY 2000 (1.25 million in FY 1999 and 1.3 million in FY 2000). INS achieved this success while continuing to ensure the integrity of the naturalization process.

The agency also fulfilled its commitment to reduce the nationwide average projected processing time for a naturalization application to 6-9 months, the historical average. This is a dramatic decrease from the 28-month average at the beginning of FY 1999.

"I am very proud that INS not only achieved its naturalization program goals but also was able to expand progress to other immigration benefit programs. This is a true testament to the extraordinary performance of INS employees," said Commissioner Meissner. "I am also grateful to Congress for providing \$176 million in FY 1999 and \$124 million in FY 2000 to boost naturalization efforts, and to the Attorney General for her continued support."

In the last eight years, from 1993 to 2000, nearly 6.9 million immigrants applied for citizenship, more than the total in the previous 40 years combined. INS' pending caseload of naturalization applications grew to more than 1.8 million at the beginning of FY 1999. Faced with this unprecedented workload, INS undertook a two-year initiative to clear the naturalization backlog and restore timely processing of citizenship applications. By the end of FY 2000, the pending caseload had dropped to nearly 800,000—the lowest it has been since November 1996.

By the end of the two-year period, the agency had received a total of more than 1.2 million new applications (more than 765,000 in FY 1999 and more than 460,000 in FY 2000). During this time, the agency was able to welcome a total of 1.8 million new citizens (nearly 900,000 in FY 1999 and again in FY 2000).

To reach its production goals, INS implemented a number of naturalization production initiatives beginning in FY 1999, which included: eliminating processing bottlenecks, improving the performance of new automated systems and their interfaces with other systems, allocating additional funding for application processing needs (i.e., contract support, overtime), and hiring 200 additional adjudicators.

During this past fiscal year, as the agency continued to make progress in handling the naturalization backlog, these initiatives were extended to expand progress to two other major immigration benefit programs—the adjustment-of-status backlog and the Green Card (Form I-551) renewal program.

### **Adjustment of Status**

Adjustment of status refers to the procedure that allows certain aliens already in the United States—who are eligible to receive an immigrant visa and for whom one is immediately available—to apply for immigrant status with INS.

The agency's adjustment-of-status application workload nearly doubled between FY 1994 and FY 1995. The pending workload of adjustment of status applications increased almost eight-fold from FY 1994 to FY 1999 (from 121,000 to 951,000).

By extending initiatives implemented to boost naturalization production, INS completed more than 564,000 adjustment-of-status applications in FY 2000—an 88 percent increase over FY 1999 completions (nearly 300,000 completions in FY 1999). The agency exceeded its goal of completing 500,000 adjustment-of-status applications in FY 2000.

### **Green Card Renewal**

In the fall of 1989, INS began issuing Green Cards with 10-year expiration dates indicated on the front of the card. INS estimates that more than 500,000 Green Card holders each year will need to renew their Green Cards. During FY 2000, INS implemented new procedures to handle this volume of work and improve customer service. This included moving most Green Card renewal processing to INS Application Support Centers—offering applicants the convenience of one-stop, walk-in service at most of the 120 sites throughout the country.

INS has achieved its goal of processing Green Card renewal applications within an average of 90 days—down dramatically from the 12-month average processing time at the end of FY 1999.

### **Customer Service Improvements**

As part of agency efforts to rebuild the naturalization system, INS implemented a number of customer service initiatives that benefit all immigration benefit applicants, and continues to plan future service improvements. These include:

#### **National Customer Service Center (NCSC) — Telephone Information Service**

As of December 1999, INS provides nationwide live telephone assistance with a single toll-free number. By dialing 1-800-375-5283, customers throughout the country can get consistent, accurate information on immigration benefits and services. This service helps

customers avoid inconvenient, time-consuming visits to INS offices, and allows local offices to focus on and improve services that can only be provided locally.

### **Change of Address Call-In System for Naturalization Applicants**

As of March 2000, naturalization applicants throughout the country can report a change of address by calling the single, toll-free NCSC number—1-800-375-5283 —instead of submitting the new address by writing to the local INS office. This new call-in system helps ensure that naturalization applicants who move will continue to receive the important time-sensitive notices that affect the processing of their cases (e.g., fingerprinting appointments, interviews and oath ceremonies).

### **INS Web site [www.ins.usdoj.gov](http://www.ins.usdoj.gov)**

INS' Web site—*INS Online*, [www.ins.usdoj.gov](http://www.ins.usdoj.gov)—provides information to the public on INS activities, programs, services and procedures, and online access to INS forms, as well as extensive information on immigration and naturalization benefits and homepages for local INS offices.

### **National Record Center**

To boost agency efficiency and provide customers more timely service, INS opened its National Records Center in Lee's Summit, Missouri, in November 1999. The Center will centralize the more than 25 million INS alien records (A-files) currently stored in more than 80 INS sites throughout the United States into a single, state-of-the-art facility. This initiative will significantly improve the integrity of INS record keeping and cut the time spent on file retrieval—a vital component of application processing and still a source of delay for many applicants—from weeks and even months to only a few days.