

PART J – OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

Chapter 1: Purpose and Background

A. Purpose

Before becoming a United States citizen, an eligible naturalization applicant must take an oath of renunciation and allegiance (Oath of Allegiance) in a public ceremony.¹ The applicant must establish that it is his or her intention, in good faith, to assume and discharge the obligations of the Oath of Allegiance.² The applicant must also establish that his or her attitude toward the Constitution and laws of the United States makes the applicant capable of fulfilling the obligations of the oath.³

B. Background

During the naturalization interview, the applicant signs the naturalization application to acknowledge his or her willingness and ability to take the Oath of Allegiance and to accept certain obligations of United States citizenship. Under certain circumstances, an applicant may qualify for a modification or waiver of the oath.⁴ In such cases, an officer draws a line through the designated modified portions of the oath and the applicant is not required to recite the deleted portions.⁵

Applicants must generally recite the Oath of Allegiance orally during a public ceremony. Merely signing the naturalization application and a copy of the oath does not make the applicant a U.S. citizen.

C. Legal Authorities

- [INA 310](#); [8 CFR 310.1](#) – Naturalization authority
- [INA 337](#); [8 CFR 337](#) – Oath of Renunciation and Allegiance
- Public Law 106-448 – Waiver of Oath of Renunciation and Allegiance for Naturalization of Aliens having Certain Disabilities Act of 2000

Chapter 2: The Oath of Allegiance

A. Oath of Allegiance

In general, naturalization applicants take the following oath in order to complete the naturalization process:

“I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or

¹ See [INA 337](#). See [8 CFR 337.1\(a\)](#).

² See [INA 337](#). See [8 CFR 337.1\(c\)](#). Under certain circumstances, an “Affirmation of Allegiance” is the same as an Oath of Allegiance. See [8 CFR 337.1\(b\)](#).

³ See [8 CFR 337.1\(c\)](#).

⁴ See [Chapter 3, Oath of Allegiance Modifications and Waivers](#).

⁵ See [8 CFR 337.1\(b\)](#).

citizen; that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law; and that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; so help me God.”⁶

The Oath of Allegiance is administered in the English language, regardless of whether the applicant was eligible for a language waiver. However, an applicant may have a translator to translate the oath during the ceremony. In addition, an applicant may request a modification to the oath because of a religious objection or an inability or unwillingness to take an oath or recite the words “under God.”⁷ An applicant or a designated representative may request an oath waiver when the applicant is unable to understand the meaning of the oath.

B. Authority to Administer the Oath

The following persons have the authority to administer the Oath of Allegiance:

- The Director;
- The Deputy Director;
- District Director;
- Field Office Director; or
- Courts.⁸

Other USCIS supervisory officers may act on behalf of the District Director or Field Office Director on a temporary basis in case of absence or if the position is vacant.⁹ In addition, Immigration Judges may also administer the Oath of Allegiance in administrative ceremonies.

C. Renunciation of Title or Order of Nobility

Any applicant who has any titles of heredity or positions of nobility in any foreign state must renounce the title or the position. The applicant must expressly renounce the title in a public ceremony and USCIS must record the renunciation as part of the proceedings.¹⁰ Failure to renounce the title of position shows a lack of attachment to the Constitution.

In order to renounce a title or position, the applicant must add one of the following phrases to the Oath of Allegiance:

- I further renounce the title of (give title or titles) which I have heretofore held; or

⁶ See [INA 337\(a\)](#). See [8 CFR 337.1\(a\)](#).

⁷ See [Chapter 3, Oath of Allegiance Modifications and Waivers](#).

⁸ See [INA 310\(b\)](#). The authority to administer the Oath of Allegiance is delegated by the Secretary of Homeland Security.

⁹ See [INA 310\(a\)](#). See [8 CFR 310.1\(b\)](#) and [8 CFR 337.2](#).

¹⁰ See [INA 337](#).

- I further renounce the order of nobility (give the order of nobility) to which I have heretofore belonged.¹¹

An applicant whose country of former nationality or origin abolished the title by law, or who no longer possesses a title, is not required to drop that portion of his or her name that originally designated such title as a part of his or her naturalization.¹²

Chapter 3: Oath of Allegiance Modifications and Waivers

The table below serves as a quick reference guide on general requirements for oath modifications and oath waiver. The sections and paragraphs that follow the table provide further guidance on each modification and oath waiver.

Oath of Allegiance Modifications and Waivers		
Request	Permitted Modifications to Oath	Testimony or Evidence
Modified Oath for Religious Objections	Deletion of either or both of the following clauses: Bearing arms on behalf of the United States if required by law [INA 337(a)(5)(A)] ; and Performing noncombatant service in the U.S. armed forces when required by law [INA 337(a)(5)(B)]	Must show opposition to clause (or clauses) based on religious training and belief (USCIS may request an attestation from the religious organization)
Affirmation of Allegiance in Lieu of Oath	Substitution of the words “solemnly affirm” for the words “on oath” and no recitation of the words “so help me God” [8 CFR 337.1(b)]	Not Required
Waiver of the Oath	Requirement to take the Oath of Allegiance may be waived	Evaluation by medical professional stating inability to understand (or communicate) the meaning of the oath due to a medical condition

¹¹ See [8 CFR 337.1\(d\)](#).

¹² See *Societe Vinicole de Champagne v. Mumm*, 143 F. 2d 240 (1944).

A. Modified Oath for Religious Objections

An applicant may request a modified oath that does not contain one or both of the following clauses:

- To bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law; and
- To perform noncombatant service in the U.S. armed forces when required by the law.¹³

There is no exemption from the clause “to perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law.”¹⁴

In order to modify the oath, the applicant must demonstrate, by clear and convincing evidence, that he or she is unwilling or unable to affirm to these sections of the oath based on his or her religious training and belief. USCIS may request an attestation from the religious organization explaining its beliefs and that the applicant is in good standing with the organization.

Depending on the specific modified oath, USCIS deletes the relevant clauses and the applicant recites the modified form of the oath.¹⁵

In order for an applicant to qualify for an exemption based on his or her “religious training and belief,” the applicant must satisfy a three-part test. An applicant must establish that:

- He or she is “opposed to any type of Service”;
- The objection is grounded in his or her religious principles; and
- His or her beliefs are sincere, meaningful, and deeply held.¹⁶

An applicant is not eligible for a modified oath when he or she is opposed to a specific war.¹⁷ Religious training or belief does not include essentially political, sociological, or philosophical views or a merely personal moral code. In addition, qualification for the exemption is not dependent upon membership in a particular religious group nor does membership in a specific religious group provide an automatic modification to the oath.

An applicant is required to take the oath when he or she is not qualified for the modification. Otherwise, the applicant is not eligible for naturalization.

B. Affirmation of Allegiance in Lieu of Oath

¹³ See [INA 337\(a\)\(5\)\(A\)](#) and [INA 337\(a\)\(5\)\(B\)](#).

¹⁴ See [INA 337\(a\)\(5\)\(C\)](#).

¹⁵ See [INA 337](#). See [8 CFR 337.1\(b\)](#).

¹⁶ See [INA 337](#). See *Welsh v. U.S.*, 398 U.S. 333 (1970). See *U.S. v. Seeger*, 280 U.S. 163 (1965). The term “religious training and belief” is limited to a person’s belief in relation to a Supreme Being involving duties superior to those arising from any human relation.

¹⁷ See *Gillette v. U.S.*, 401 U.S. 437 (1971).

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An applicant may request an affirmation in lieu of an oath. The applicant may request this affirmation in lieu of an oath for any reason.¹⁸ In these cases:

- The applicant substitutes the words “solemnly affirm” for the words “on oath”; and
- The applicant does not recite the words “so help me God.”¹⁹

USCIS grants this modification solely upon the applicant’s request. The applicant is not required to establish that the request is based solely on his or her religious training and belief. Applicants are not required to provide any documentary evidence or testimony to support a request to substitute the words “on oath” or “so help me God.”

USCIS must not require the applicant to recite the deleted portions of the Oath of Allegiance at the ceremony. The officer informs the applicant that he or she is not required to recite the deleted portions and that the applicant may take the oath in the modified form.

C. Waiver of the Oath

1. Oath of Allegiance Waiver

Oath Waiver Based on a Medical Disability

USCIS may waive the Oath of Allegiance for an applicant who is unable to understand or to communicate an understanding of its meaning because of a physical or developmental disability or mental impairment.²⁰

An applicant for whom USCIS granted an oath waiver is considered to have met the requirement of attachment to the principles of the Constitution of the United States, and be well disposed to the good order and happiness of the United States for the required period.

In order for USCIS to adjudicate a request for an oath waiver because of a medical condition, an applicant with the assistance of a legal guardian, surrogate, or designated representative must provide a written request and a written evaluation by a certified medical professional. An applicant is not required to submit a specific form to request an oath waiver.²¹ USCIS accepts an oath waiver request at any point of the naturalization process.

Oath Waiver for Children under 14 Years of Age

¹⁸ The INA indicates that the affirmation is requested “by reason of religious training and belief (or individual interpretation thereof), or for other reasons of good conscience.” See [INA 337\(a\)](#).

¹⁹ See [8 CFR 337.1\(b\)](#).

²⁰ See [INA 337\(a\)](#). See Pub. L. 106-448 enacted on July 12, 2000.

²¹ The oath waiver requirements are distinct from the requirements for the medical exception to the English and civics requirements for naturalization under [INA 312\(b\)](#), which requires an applicant to submit a medical exception form. See [Part E, English and Civics Testing and Exceptions, Chapter 3, Medical Disability Exception \(Form N-648\)](#).

The INA permits USCIS to waive the taking of the Oath of Allegiance if USCIS determines the person is unable to understand its meaning.²² USCIS has determined that children under the age of 14 are generally unable to understand the meaning of the oath. Accordingly, USCIS waives the oath requirement for a child younger than 14 years of age. If USCIS waives the oath requirement, USCIS issues a Certificate of Citizenship after the officer approves the application.²³

2. Legal Guardian, Surrogate or Designated Representative

When an applicant is unable to undergo any part of the naturalization examination because of a physical or developmental disability or mental impairment, a legal guardian, surrogate or an eligible designated representative completes the naturalization process for the applicant. USCIS waives the Oath of Allegiance and the legal guardian, surrogate or designated representative attests to the applicant's eligibility for naturalization.²⁴ In addition to oath waiver, this process may require accommodations including off-site examinations.

In order for USCIS to adjudicate a request for an oath waiver, an applicant, with the assistance of a legal guardian, surrogate, or designated representative must provide a written request and a written evaluation by a certified medical professional. USCIS accepts a request for the waiver at any point in the naturalization process until the time of the oath ceremony. As an accommodation, field offices should work with the legal guardian, surrogate or designated representative before the initial examination to obtain all the necessary documentation.

When an oath waiver is provided, a legal guardian or surrogate, or designated representative²⁵ signs on behalf of an applicant who is unable to understand or communicate an understanding of the Oath of Allegiance because of a disability. The guardian, surrogate, or representative acts on behalf of an applicant with a disability at every stage of the naturalization examination. The guardian, surrogate, or representative files the application on behalf of the applicant and must have knowledge of the facts supporting the applicant's eligibility for naturalization.

The guardian, surrogate, or representative addresses every requirement for naturalization and bears the burden of establishing the applicant's eligibility for naturalization.

Persons eligible to act on behalf of the applicant include:

- A person who a proper court has designated as the applicant's legal guardian or surrogate and who is authorized to exercise legal authority over the applicant's affairs;²⁶ or

²² See [INA 337\(a\)](#). See [8 CFR 341.5\(b\)](#).

²³ See [Part H, Children of U.S. Citizens](#).

²⁴ See [Chapter 3, Oath of Allegiance Modifications and Waivers](#).

²⁵ See [Chapter 3, Oath of Allegiance Modifications and Waivers](#).

²⁶ A legal guardian or surrogate may act on behalf of an applicant regardless of the legal guardian or surrogate's immigration status or whether he or she is a family member.

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- In the absence of a legal guardian or surrogate, a United States citizen spouse, parent, adult son or daughter, or adult brother or sister, who is the primary custodial caregiver and who takes responsibility for the applicant.

USCIS will only recognize one designated representative in the following order of priority:²⁷

- Legal guardian or surrogate (highest priority)
- U.S. citizen spouse
- U.S. citizen parent
- U.S. citizen adult son or daughter
- U.S. citizen adult brother or sister (lowest priority)

The person acting on behalf of the applicant must provide proof of legal guardianship, or documentation to establish the familial relationship, such as a birth certificate, marriage certificate, or adoption decree. In addition, the person must provide documentation to establish that he or she has the primary custodial care and responsibility for the applicant (for example, income tax returns, Social Security Administration documents, and affidavits from other relatives). A spouse, parent, adult son or daughter, or adult brother or sister who is not the legal guardian or surrogate must provide evidence of U.S. citizenship.

USCIS continues an application where the family member acting as a designated representative is not a U.S. citizen. USCIS explains to the family member why he or she is not qualified to act as a designated representative and offers the applicant an opportunity to bring another person who may qualify.

3. Written Evaluation

In general, USCIS requires a written evaluation to establish the applicant's inability to take the Oath of Allegiance. An applicant or designated representative requesting an oath waiver submits a written evaluation completed by a medical professional licensed to practice in the United States.

The written evaluation must:

- Be completed by the medical professional who has had the longest relationship with the applicant or is most familiar with the applicant's medical history;
- Express the applicant's medical condition and disability in terms that an officer and the designated representative can understand (except for medical definitions or terms to describe the disability);
- State why and how the applicant is unable to understand or communicate an understanding of the meaning of the Oath of Allegiance because of the disability;

²⁷ If there is a conflict in priority between two or more persons seeking to represent the applicant, and the individuals share the same degree of familial relationship, USCIS gives priority to the person who is older.

- Indicate the likelihood of the applicant being able to communicate or demonstrate an understanding of the meaning of the Oath of Allegiance in the near future; and
- Be signed by the medical professional completing the written evaluation and contain his or her state license number authorizing the medical professional to practice in the United States.

USCIS will not require medical professionals to provide an explanation of how they reached their diagnosis, a listing of clinical or laboratory techniques used to reach the diagnosis, or supporting documentation to establish the claimed disability. USCIS, however, will require the medical professional to provide a thorough explanation of how the applicant's disability impairs his or her functioning so severely that the applicant is unable to demonstrate an understanding of the oath requirements or communicate an understanding of its meaning.

USCIS reserves the right to request documentation if there is a question upon examination about the applicant's disability and ability to understand the oath requirement. If USCIS approves the oath waiver, USCIS does not require the applicant to appear in a public ceremony.

Chapter 4: General Considerations for All Oath Ceremonies

A. USCIS Administrative Ceremony

USCIS field offices conduct administrative ceremonies at regular intervals as frequently as is necessary. USCIS must conduct ceremonies in such a manner as to preserve the dignity and significance of the occasion. In some instances, USCIS offices may conduct daily ceremonies where the examination, adjudication, and the oath take place on the same day. District Directors and Field Office Directors must ensure that administrative ceremonies conducted by USCIS in their districts comply with the USCIS "Model Plan for Naturalization Ceremonies."²⁸

An applicant must appear in person at a public ceremony unless USCIS excuses the appearance. USCIS designates the time and place for the ceremony and conducts the ceremony within the proper jurisdiction. USCIS presumes an applicant to have abandoned his or her naturalization application when the applicant fails to appear for more than one oath ceremony.²⁹ In such cases, USCIS executes and issues a motion to reopen and may deny the application if the applicant has not responded within 15 days.³⁰

B. Derogatory Information Received before Oath or Failure to Appear

An officer must execute a motion to reopen a previously approved naturalization application if:

- USCIS receives or identifies disqualifying derogatory information about the applicant after approval of his or her application prior to the administration of the Oath of Allegiance;³¹ or

²⁸ See [Chapter 5, Model Plan for Administrative Naturalization Ceremonies](#).

²⁹ See [8 CFR 337.10](#).

³⁰ See [Part B, Naturalization Examination, Chapter 5, Motion to Reopen](#). See [8 CFR 335.3\(a\)](#) and [8 CFR 337](#).

³¹ See [8 CFR 335.5](#).

- An applicant fails to appear for at least two ceremonies to take the Oath of Allegiance without good cause.³²

USCIS notifies the applicant in writing about the receipt of derogatory information or multiple failures to appear through the motion to reopen. The applicant has 15 days to respond to the motion to reopen and overcome the derogatory information or provide good cause for failing to appear at the Oath ceremony.³³

USCIS must not schedule an applicant for the administration of the Oath of Allegiance if USCIS receives or identifies disqualifying derogatory information. USCIS must not administer the Oath of Allegiance to the applicant until the matter is resolved favorably.

If the applicant overcomes the derogatory information and qualifies for naturalization, the officer approves the application and schedules the applicant for the Oath of Allegiance. If the applicant is unable to overcome the derogatory information, the officer grants the motion to reopen and denies the application on its merits.³⁴

An applicant who fails to appear for at least two ceremonies to administer the Oath of Allegiance, without good cause, abandons his or her intent to be naturalized. USCIS considers multiple failures to appear to be equivalent to receipt of derogatory information after the approval of a naturalization application.³⁵

Chapter 5: Model Plan for Administrative Naturalization Ceremonies

The naturalization ceremony is a pivotal milestone in the naturalization process. USCIS aims to make administrative naturalization ceremonies positive, memorable moments in the lives of the participants. The significance of the Oath of Allegiance will be honored by USCIS policies and practices that reflect the special, unique nature of the occasion.

The following guidance provides USCIS officials with the Model Plan for Administrative Naturalization Ceremonies (model plan) for conducting administrative naturalization ceremonies in a meaningful and consistent manner.³⁶

A. U.S. Citizenship Welcome Packet

1. Contents of U.S. Citizenship Welcome Packet

³² See [8 CFR 337.10](#).

³³ See [8 CFR 335.5](#).

³⁴ See [8 CFR 336.1](#).

³⁵ See [8 CFR 337.10](#).

³⁶ This model plan applies only to administrative naturalization ceremonies involving an Application for Naturalization (Form N-400) where a USCIS designated official or an Immigration Judge administers the Oath of Allegiance. The model plan does not apply to administrative ceremonies involving children obtaining evidence of citizenship (Application for Citizenship, Form N-600, or Application for Citizenship and Issuance of Certificate Under Section 322, Form N-600K) or judicial naturalization ceremonies where a federal, state or local court administers the Oath of Allegiance.

To standardize the experience at naturalization ceremonies, USCIS created the U.S. Citizenship Welcome Packet (Form M-771) for distribution to every naturalization candidate participating in an administrative ceremony in the United States.³⁷

The U.S. Citizenship Welcome Packet consists of the following:

- President's Congratulatory Letter and Envelope;
- Department of State Form DS-11, Passport Application;
- Form M-767, Important Information for New Citizens;
- Form M-789, Oath of Allegiance/The Star Spangled Banner/Pledge of Allegiance Flier;
- Certificate Holder; and
- A Voter's Guide to Federal Elections.

2. Distribution of U.S. Citizenship Welcome Packet

USCIS distributes the welcome packet to each person being naturalized either during the check-in process or after the ceremony program.³⁸ USCIS can distribute the welcome packet before the naturalization candidate has been administered the Oath of Allegiance but only after a USCIS officer has determined that the applicant is eligible to take the Oath of Allegiance on the day of the ceremony.

Because the welcome packet contains information for naturalized citizens, USCIS employees must:

- Make a statement that an applicant does not become a U.S. citizen until he or she takes the Oath of Allegiance, regardless of the contents of the welcome packet, whenever distributed;
- Make a general statement about the contents of the welcome packet; and
- Answer the candidates' naturalization-related questions.

The welcome packet includes the official congratulatory letter of the President of the United States. That letter is the only congratulatory letter USCIS distributes nationwide at naturalization ceremonies. If the U.S. flag is distributed, it should be distributed exclusively to naturalization candidates.

USCIS field office leadership will determine, in consultation with the USCIS Ethics Office, whether materials and publications outside of the U.S. flag and the contents of the welcome packet are appropriate for distribution. Partisan publications, publications referencing a specific political group, and materials that contain commercial or religious solicitation or promotion of any kind must never be distributed to new citizens.

Other governmental entities and non-governmental entities must not distribute their materials and publications until after the USCIS official has concluded the administrative naturalization ceremony and has released the new

³⁷ To the extent practicable, U.S. Citizenship Welcome Packet (Form M-771) will also be distributed to candidates participating in naturalization ceremonies overseas, subject to circumstances such as the location of the ceremony and the capacity of active military to carry the necessary materials in an active war zone.

³⁸ See [Section B, Ceremony Check-in Process](#), and [Section C, Ceremony Program](#).

citizens. Field leadership will determine, in consultation with the USCIS Ethics Office, whether outside organizations' materials are appropriate for distribution.³⁹

3. Citizen's Almanac and Pocket-size Declaration of Independence and Constitution

In addition, the Citizen's Almanac (Form M-76) and the Pocket-size Declaration of Independence and Constitution of the United States (Form M-654) must be made available to all interested naturalization candidates or newly naturalized citizens at the:

- Check-in process;
- Conclusion of the oath ceremony program; or
- Conclusion of the naturalization interview.

The preferred distribution method for on-site and off-site ceremonies is during the check-in process or at the conclusion of the oath ceremony. The items may be placed on a table in an area accessible to the naturalization candidates.

B. Ceremony Check-In Process

USCIS officers perform the ceremony check-in process before the start of the ceremony program. A USCIS officer reviews the responses on each naturalization candidate's Notice of Naturalization Oath Ceremony (Form N-445) and updates responses as necessary. Once each candidate's eligibility for naturalization is verified, the officer collects from each candidate any and all USCIS-issued travel documents and lawful permanent resident cards.

C. Ceremony Program

To standardize the naturalization ceremony experience, unless exempted, USCIS offices will implement these steps in all administrative ceremonies:⁴⁰

- Play "Faces of America";⁴¹
- Play the National Anthem, The Star Spangled Banner, instrumental or vocal version;⁴²
- Opening (welcoming) remarks by Master of Ceremonies;⁴³
- Announce the "call of countries";⁴⁴

³⁹ The Citizen's Almanac (Form M-76) and the Pocket-size Declaration of Independence and Constitution of the United States (Form M-654) must be made available to all interested naturalization candidates or newly naturalized citizens.

⁴⁰ USCIS offices are exempt from implementing the ceremony program when conducting a home visit, or an expedited administrative naturalization ceremony. See [Chapter 6, Judicial and Expedited Oath Ceremonies](#).

⁴¹ See USCIS Naturalization Ceremony Video for the Faces of America segment.

⁴² See USCIS Naturalization Ceremony Video for instrumental or vocal version of the National Anthem. USCIS offices may incorporate a live performance as an alternative to the version on the video.

⁴³ Opening (welcoming) remarks include, but are not limited to, an introduction of ceremony principals and an overview of the ceremony program.

⁴⁴ The designated official reads aloud a list of countries represented by the naturalization candidates' former nationalities.

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- Administer the Oath of Allegiance to the naturalization candidates;⁴⁵
- Keynote remarks by USCIS field leadership or guest speaker;⁴⁶
- Play Presidential Congratulatory Remarks;⁴⁷
- Recite the Pledge of Allegiance;
- Concluding remarks by Master of Ceremonies or USCIS field leadership;⁴⁸ and
- Present the Certificate of Naturalization (Form N-550).⁴⁹

Field offices may also enhance the ceremony program with additional appropriate elements, such as with a rendition of “America the Beautiful.”

D. Guest Speakers at Naturalization Ceremonies

USCIS welcomes participation from distinguished community members. A guest speaker may be a civic, governmental, or military leader, a Member of Congress, a judge, a DHS official, or person whom USCIS deems appropriate for the occasion.

USCIS field leadership of the USCIS office conducting the ceremony must review the qualifications of any potential guest speaker who is not a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) employee and approve of his or her role in the program before he or she speaks at an administrative naturalization ceremony. If USCIS headquarters selects a person to be a guest speaker at a USCIS field office’s administrative naturalization ceremony, headquarters will review the person’s qualifications before making the recommendation.

It is the responsibility of field leadership of the USCIS office conducting the administrative naturalization ceremony to preserve the solemnity and dignity of the occasion. When the guest speaker is selected and scheduled, field leadership must send the speaker written notice describing USCIS’s expectations that appropriate remarks will focus on:

- Importance of U.S citizenship;
- New privileges (such as the ability to travel with a U.S. Passport, apply for a position in the Federal government, and to vote in federal elections);
- Responsibilities of U.S. citizenship (such as applying for a U.S. passport and registering to vote);
- Civic principles within the U.S. government;
- Significance of swearing allegiance to the United States; or
- Theme of the ceremony.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ See [Chapter 2, The Oath of Allegiance](#). See [INA 337](#). See [8 CFR 337.1\(a\)](#).

⁴⁶ Keynote remarks must be politically neutral and may include, but are not limited to, the privileges, responsibilities, and importance of U.S. citizenship; the importance of civic principles within the U.S. government; the significance of swearing allegiance to the United States; and the theme of the ceremony.

⁴⁷ See USCIS Naturalization Ceremony Video for Presidential Congratulatory Remarks.

⁴⁸ Concluding remarks may include, but are not limited to, expressing appreciation to those family and friends in attendance, acknowledging the achievement of the naturalized citizens, announcing the services of those governmental and non-governmental entities in attendance, and explaining the distribution method for the certificates of naturalization.

⁴⁹ USCIS field leadership and staff presents the Certificates of Naturalization to the naturalized U.S. citizens.

⁵⁰ See internal USCIS guidance for further guidance on guest speakers.

Inappropriate remarks, including political (partisan or otherwise), commercial or religious statements, are not permitted.⁵¹

USCIS must uphold the integrity of each administrative naturalization ceremony and ensure that it is a politically neutral event. The presence of candidates for public office at a naturalization ceremony may create a perception inconsistent with USCIS's obligation of neutrality. Accordingly, candidates for public office generally may not speak at or participate in an administrative naturalization ceremony within the three months before an election for that office, including both primary and general elections.⁵²

E. Voter Registration at Naturalization Ceremonies

1. Voter Registration

The ability to vote in federal elections is both a right and responsibility that comes with U.S. citizenship. All newly naturalized citizens will have the opportunity to receive a voter registration application at administrative naturalization ceremonies. The mechanism for distribution may vary by ceremony location, but in every case must take place only after the conclusion of the ceremony.

The options for distribution of voter registration applications are (in preferential order):

- State or local government election offices may distribute and collect voter registration applications for an Election Official to review and officially register the person to vote;
- Non-governmental organizations may distribute and collect voter registration applications for an Election Official to review and officially register the person to vote (if qualified and approved according to the criteria identified below); or
- In the absence of the above options, USCIS will provide voter registration applications to all new citizens – USCIS is not responsible for the collection of applications or any other activities related to voter registration.

⁵¹ If a guest speaker makes inappropriate remarks during an administrative naturalization ceremony, field Leadership should inform the speaker and elevate the issue up the field leadership chain. If the guest speaker does not indicate a willingness to modify his or her remarks in the future, field leadership should not accept requests from the person to speak at future administrative naturalization ceremonies.

⁵² For example, if the state primary elections are on February 7, 2012, a candidate for public office standing in those primary elections may not be a guest speaker or have another formal participatory role any time between November 7, 2011 and February 7, 2012. The three-month rule does not apply to the President or Vice President of the United States. In addition, in exceptional circumstances, the USCIS Ethics Office may authorize exceptions to the three-month rule if the candidate's participation, subject to any appropriate conditions, would not unduly compromise the ceremony's political neutrality and would serve both USCIS's and the ceremony's best interests. If any additional questions arise related to the three-month rule, Field Leadership should contact their designated Ethics Officer.

If no space is available for governmental or non-governmental entities to provide on-site voter registration services, the USCIS field office will distribute voter registration applications, whenever feasible, to each newly naturalized citizen.⁵³

2. Registration by Non-governmental Organizations

In-person voter registration services by the state or local election office is the optimal mechanism for distribution. If state or local election officials are unable to participate, all interested non-governmental groups may seek the privilege of offering voter registration services at the conclusion of administrative naturalization ceremonies.

Field leadership must consider requests from all interested organizations seeking to participate in the ceremony and must offer equal, non-preferential opportunities to all qualified and approved non-governmental organizations.

To qualify, non-governmental organizations must be both non-profit and non-partisan. Organizations must be deemed qualified by USCIS field leadership. All interested organizations seeking to offer voter registration services at the conclusion of a USCIS administrative naturalization ceremony must submit a request in writing to the local USCIS Field Office Director to be considered. Field leadership will provide a written response, only after consultation with the USCIS Office of Chief Counsel's Ethics Office, within 60 days from receipt of the organization's written request.⁵⁴

When USCIS determines that an organization is qualified and is chosen to participate in voter registration services at an administrative naturalization ceremony, field leadership will send the organization a letter, listing specific selected requirements.⁵⁵ Field leadership will then contact the organization to determine its availability to participate in scheduled administrative ceremonies.

While participating, non-governmental organizations and their representatives MUST NOT:

- Participate in any political activity, partisan or otherwise, while participating in voter registration activities during administrative naturalization ceremonies, regardless of whether the ceremonies take place on federal or non-federal property;⁵⁶
- Engage in commercial or religious solicitation or promotion of any kind; or

⁵³ If a field office is unable to distribute voter registration forms in any of the above three (3) vehicles, field leadership must notify their chain of command within the Field Operations Directorate.

⁵⁴ Approval may be granted on a one-time or standing basis, but may be removed at any time if the participation requirements are not met.

⁵⁵ See internal USCIS guidance for further guidance on voter registration by non-governmental organizations.

⁵⁶ Political activity includes activity directed toward the success or failure of a political party, candidate for partisan political office, or partisan political group. For this purpose, political activity also includes advocacy for particular referenda or other political propositions. For example, a non-governmental group participating in voter registration activities at an administrative naturalization ceremony may not provide information for or against a state immigration law or proposition. The organization's activities while participating must also comply with the Hatch Act, [5 U.S.C. 7321-26](#).

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- Discriminate on the basis of race, color, gender, religion, age, sexual orientation, national or ethnic origin, disability, marital status or veteran status.

While participating, non-governmental organizations and their representatives MUST:

- Safeguard all personal information new citizens provide for voter registration and are prohibited from using this information for any purpose other than voter registration;
- Follow scheduling and logistical requirements set forth by USCIS field leadership;
- Wear professional attire and represent themselves and their organization professionally;
- Have received proper training on how to register voters;
- Receive an on-site briefing from field leadership regarding rules for that particular venue; and
- Wear name tags that include the name of the organization while registering voters (no other identification of the organization may be worn or displayed).

3. Failure to Comply with Requirements for Voter Registration by Non-governmental Organizations

If a non-governmental entity fails to comply with the above requirements for participation, field leadership, in consultation with the USCIS Ethics Office, may revoke this privilege and exclude the entity from participating in future administrative naturalization ceremonies that occur on or outside of the administrative ceremony location.

In addition, if a USCIS official receives a complaint from a newly naturalized citizen, guest or family member of a newly naturalized citizen, or the state or local election office regarding an entity's inappropriate behavior or lack of ability to properly provide voter registration services, field leadership, in consultation with the USCIS Ethics Office, may revoke the privilege upon appropriate inquiry and review of the circumstances.⁵⁷

4. Points-of-Contact for Voting and Voter Registration

If naturalized citizens have questions regarding voting and voter registration, USCIS should refer them to:

- The governmental or non-governmental entity offering voter registration services on-site;
- Other information resources within the local area; or
- The official U.S. government Web site www.usa.gov.

F. Participation from Other Government Entities

⁵⁷ See internal USCIS guidance for further guidance on voter registration by non-governmental organizations.

Federal, state, and local governmental entities, such as the Department of State's Passport Services Division, and the Social Security Administration, may be authorized to provide information and make services available to newly naturalized citizens and their guests at the conclusion of the administrative naturalization ceremony. Governmental entities that desire representation at administrative naturalization ceremonies must seek advance approval from field leadership of the USCIS office conducting the ceremony.

G. Participation from Volunteers and Civic Organizations

Field leadership may enlist individual volunteers, community-based organizations, and civic organizations to participate in various roles during the administrative naturalization ceremony. For example, Field leadership may have the U.S. armed forces Color Guard perform the presentation of colors and the national anthem or have volunteers lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

Field leadership must consider requests from all interested, qualified volunteers and organizations so that all have an equal opportunity to participate in the ceremony. Field leadership will determine the appropriate level of participation for the occasion; however, under no circumstances will any non-USCIS employee perform any USCIS function.⁵⁸

Field leadership must review the qualifications, designate the level of participation, and oversee the participation of all volunteers and organizations during the administrative naturalization ceremony. In addition, non-USCIS participants must not engage in political, commercial, or religious activity of any kind.

H. Offers to Donate Use of Venues for Naturalization Ceremonies

USCIS employees must not solicit a gift (including donated use of a venue to hold an administrative naturalization ceremony) from any non-Federal entity.⁵⁹ An unsolicited gift, however, may be accepted with the concurrence of the USCIS Ethics Office and approval of the USCIS Director.⁶⁰

Chapter 6: Judicial and Expedited Oath Ceremonies

A. Judicial Oath Ceremony

An applicant may elect to have his or her Oath of Allegiance administered by the court or the court may have exclusive authority to administer the oath.⁶¹ In these instances, USCIS must notify the clerk of court, in writing, that the Secretary of Homeland Security has determined that the applicant is eligible to naturalize.

After administering the Oath of Allegiance, the clerk of court must issue each person who appeared for the ceremony a document indicating the court administered the oath. In addition, the clerk must issue a document indicating that the court changed the applicant's name (if applicable).

⁵⁸ For example, volunteers must not perform any of the USCIS employee's duties within the ceremony check-in process.

⁵⁹ See internal USCIS guidance for further guidance on offers to donate venues for ceremonies.

⁶⁰ This process is not required when non-government entities host USCIS for conducting citizenship outreach initiatives and workshops.

⁶¹ See [INA 310\(b\)](#).

B. Expedited Oath Ceremony

An applicant may request, with sufficient cause, that either USCIS or the court grant an expedited oath ceremony.⁶² In determining whether to grant an expedited oath ceremony, the court or the USCIS District Director may consider special circumstances of a compelling or humanitarian nature. Special circumstances may include but are not limited to:

- A serious illness of the applicant or a member of the applicant's family;
- A permanent disability of the applicant sufficiently incapacitating as to prevent the applicant's personal appearance at a scheduled ceremony;
- The developmental disability or advanced age of the applicant which would make appearance at a scheduled ceremony improper; or
- An urgent or compelling circumstances relating to travel or employment determined by the court or USCIS to be sufficiently meritorious to warrant special consideration.⁶³

USCIS may seek verification of the validity of the information provided in the request. If the applicant is waiting for a court ceremony, USCIS must promptly provide the court with a copy of the request without reaching a decision on whether to grant or deny the request.

Courts exercising exclusive authority may either hold an expedited oath ceremony or, if an expedited judicial oath ceremony is impractical, refer the applicant to USCIS. In addition, the court must inform the District Director, in writing, of the court's decision to grant the applicant an expedited oath ceremony and that the court has relinquished exclusive jurisdiction as to that applicant.

⁶² See [INA 337\(c\)](#). See [8 CFR 337.3\(a\)](#).

⁶³ See [8 CFR 337.3\(c\)](#).