**USCIS / Legal Service Provider Meeting Questions**

**San Antonio Field Office**

**November 12, 2021**

**10 AM**

**WebEx Meeting**

**UNOFFICIAL NOTES OF ORAL RESPONSES FROM MEETING**

1. **Are there any general updates for the San Antonio Field Office?  Specifically, can you give us an update about officers who have left the SAFO and new officers who have started and/or will be starting?**

2020-2021 Fiscal year:

SAFO completed adjudication of about 16,000 naturalization applications.

SAFO completed adjudication of about 6400 family-based I-485 applications, about 2300 employment-based I-485 applications, and about 1400 I-751 applications.

SAFO surpassed the overall production goal by 7% (even with having team members temporarily out of the office on special projects like the Operation Allies Welcome to process partners & allies from Afghanistan).

Staffing updates (please excuse any misspellings of names!):

SAFO lost three experienced officers to the TSC (working from home), but there are 2 new officers--Katherine Burns (from the Houston Asylum Office) & Yvonne Williams (promoted from within SAFO) who have started.

Mary Lou Orozco is no longer with the SAFO.

New supervisor Rakia Johnson (from Harlingen) has started at the SAFO.

Interview queues are generally at pre-pandemic levels. SAFO is considering overtime interviews and oath ceremonies, so our clients could have a Saturday interview or oath ceremony in the near future.

SAFO is still concerned with safety regarding COVID, and precautions are in place. Local conditions are being monitored.

1. **Does the SAFO foresee any changes to customer service options? For example, is there a possibility that the attorney email inquiry system could be reopened?**

Field Office Director Tina Almond is not aware of any coming change regarding this.

1. **Will the procedure continue where applicants are scheduled on the day of the naturalization interview for an upcoming Friday ceremony?**

Yes

1. **Are any large Oath Ceremonies at a venue outside of the San Antonio Field Office being scheduled or planned yet?**

One outdoor ceremony at an Austin Library is scheduled for 12/17/2021 at 10:00 is scheduled. SAFO is talking to some San Antonio venues about having Oath Ceremonies at other locations outside the Field Office.

1. **How often/when are same-day Naturalization Oath Ceremonies scheduled?**

Generally, same-day ceremonies are held Monday-Wednesday on the 2nd and 3rd weeks of the month. Friday ceremonies are scheduled 3-4 times per month. There is no schedule yet beyond December. SAFO monitors the queue of those waiting for an Oath Ceremony and adjusts monthly.

1. **What is the average wait time for a Naturalization Oath Ceremony when the Applicant is not scheduled for the same afternoon or scheduled on the same day for an upcoming Friday?  Is there a schedule for SAFO Oath Ceremonies for the next few months?**

For those applicants from the San Antonio/Austin area, waits for a ceremony >1 month are rare.

1. **Are Naturalization Oath Ceremonies now being conducted throughout the SAFO jurisdiction?   How often are ceremonies scheduled for Corpus Christi, Laredo, San Angelo, Del Rio, and College Station?  Are any of these ceremonies already scheduled, and if so, could you please provide the dates?**

There are none scheduled for December as of the date of the meeting. The ceremonies are subject to court availability. The courts in Laredo, Bryan, and San Angelo were open as of 11/2021. Corpus Christi courts are not open, but they are expected to reopen soon.

1. **What is the average time for naturalization applicants to be scheduled for interviews in San Antonio? How is the estimated case processing time on the USCIS website calculated (**[**https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times**](https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times)**), and how often is this information updated?  Currently, on the website, the estimated time for an N-400 in San Antonio is 10-14.5 months.  In practice, the legal service providers see much shorter processing than this for most cases.**

Case processing times are generally accurate, and the update is done monthly. Case processing is considered: date of receipt to final adjudication (oath ceremony or denial).

1. **Several attorneys report having naturalization cases filed in 2020 that have still not been scheduled for interviews at the SAFO.   While not what is posted as the normal processing time, applicants are regularly interviewed and attend an oath ceremony within 2-6 months.  Is there a way for the SAFO to request that the National Benefits Center move forward with pending 2020 N-400 applications? What would you advise practitioners to do regarding these long-pending cases?**

Fluctuations mostly relate to the NRC’s ability to retrieve files from the Federal Retirement Center (FRC). Older A-files are stored here as well as files for other government agencies. NARA has limited staffing. This issue explains the case processing time fluctuation in about 99% of the N-400 cases. This issue affects cases in all field offices, and HQ is aware and is working with NARA and the Records Directorate. Most delays are not really related to a background check. About 3000 N-400s from 2020 in SAFO are waiting because of this A-file retrieval issue.

1. **What is the average time for processing of adjustment of status applications in San Antonio? Currently, on the USCIS website, the estimated time for a family-based AOS in San Antonio is 10.5-21.5 months. The estimated time for an employment-based AOS in San Antonio is 10-11 months.  Is this accurate as an average?  What legal service providers see in practice sometimes varies significantly from this.**

Case processing times are generally accurate, and the update is done monthly.

1. **Several attorneys report having family-based adjustment of status cases filed 12-18 months ago for clients who have still not received their interviews.   Where cases are outside of posted processing times, and a Service Inquiry is done, the response is that the cases are in process. Other family-based adjustment of status cases are being interviewed in as short as a few months after receipt.  What would you advise practitioners to do regarding these long-pending cases?**

In many AOS cases, the issue is the physical file (where the applicant already had an A-file prior to the AOS filing). With I-485s, there are also other possible reasons for fluctuations. Many of these applicants need a full biometrics capture, and the ASC is still catching up. Preference cases are not being put into the queue until a visa is available.

1. **When a case is referred to the NTA committee for review (for example, a denied N-400 where previous misrepresentation may have been made), can the applicants and their representatives be notified of the final decision of the committee, so that the applicant can know where they stand?  This would be helpful for the avoidance of in absentia orders and other issues.  If a case is not referred to the NTA committee, can the information about the date for eligibility to refile be put in the denial notice (barring any other factual changes)?**

Internal review deliberations by the committee are not public information. The applicant will receive notice in the form of a denial or an oath ceremony notice.

1. **Would it be possible for the SAFO to notify someone at the national office that the websites for paying immigrant fees and filing electronic AR-11 no longer accept .org email addresses?  This is causing problems for some applicants and attorneys.**

Section Chief Chris Saucedo attempted to send an IT request for review on this issue. He’s trying to get attention to see if it can be addressed.

1. **What is the status of rescheduling the canceled interview appointments (the appointments were canceled due to staff working on special assignments, including the processing of the Afghanis)?**

Most have already been rescheduled. For any not rescheduled by 12/31/2021, please email Chris Saucedo. Christobal.Saucedo@uscis.dhs.gov

1. **When individuals request a rescheduling of Naturalization Oath Ceremonies (due to being out of San Antonio on the scheduled date), how long on average does it take for them to be rescheduled?**

In San Antonio/Austin area, the SAFO will attempt to accommodate scheduling requests or will assign them to the next available ceremony. For ceremonies outside of the area, the wait will likely be longer before the person can be put in another ceremony.

1. **An attorney reports multiple clients have recently received I-751 biometrics appointment notices after the actual appointment date.  The notices have been mailed out less than 2 weeks before the appointment and have not been delivered until 1-3 days after the appointment date.  Will the San Antonio ASC take these individuals if they come in the day after receiving the late notice?**

The ASC will attempt to accommodate applicants with this issue. See answer to #17 as well.

1. **Has there been any change regarding the San Antonio ASC office taking applicants at a time or date different from that on the appointment notice?  This was allowed on a case-by-case, space-available basis pre-COVID, but we understood that there was no flexibility because of COVID precautions in place.**

The Application Support Centers in San Antonio, Austin, and Laredo will all try to accommodate applicants on a case-by-case basis. The applicant should go to the ASC even if the scheduled date has passed and ask for the Site Supervisor. Applicants should take the notice (even if the appointment date has passed) as the barcode on it is needed.

1. **Regarding cases where EOIR terminates/closes proceedings to allow the individuals to adjust status with USCIS:  At the last meeting, this question was raised, and the answer was that the applicant should not schedule an InfoPass appointment to file an application because the ICE attorneys were coordinating this.  Once an adjustment package that had been filed with the Immigration Court is transferred to the SAFO or possibly to the National Benefits Center, will the applicant and the attorney be notified by USCIS and receive biometric scheduling?  Can you give a general timeline on time from termination of the case by EOIR to receiving a biometrics or interview notice?**

These cases are coming from ICE. SAFO cannot give a timeline.

1. **Can you provide an update on how the InfoPass system is working in the San Antonio office?  How many InfoPass appointments are being seen daily? What is the current wait for an InfoPass appointment at the SAFO?  Are InfoPass appointments still available for emergency walk-ins in emergency situations?**

There are 22 Infopass appointments available per day. The appointments are not full. Emergency walk-in’s are taken on a case-by-case basis with the determination made by a Supervisor.

1. **What is the correct procedure to expedite a pending Advanced Parole request? Ex. Applicant filed an I-131 as per instructions, and then the sick relative died. At an InfoPass appointment, Applicant provided a copy of the original filing and death certificate.  Applicant was told that he would have to pay the fee again or the SAFO could request the expedite with the original filing. The Applicant chose to have it expedited rather than re-pay. However, months have passed, and there is still no answer. Why would a second payment of the I-131 fee be required? What is the best course to get advance parole where an I-131 is pending with USCIS when the urgent need to travel arises?**

If SAFO does an expedite request and the case is at the NBC, the case should be adjudicated in about 10 days. If SAFO does an expedite request and the case is at a Service Center, the case should be adjudicated in about 15 days. An applicant can choose to pay the $575 I-131 filing fee and have the case adjudicated on the same day. The fee for the I-131 can only be waived if there is an I-485 pending that was filed after 7/30/2007. The Policy Manual is controlling on these fees.

1. **When a case has been administratively closed, what is the best way to contact the SAFO to request that the case be re-opened and scheduled for the interview?**

If the case is administratively closed because of removal proceedings, the recommendation is for the attorney to ask the OPLA attorney at the hearing to route the file to USCIS. The attorney can also send a letter by postal mail to the SAFO with the Receipt Number and A#.

1. **What is the average adjudication time for military parole in place requests?**

6 months

1. **What is the best way to request that an interview date be rescheduled?  Is there any special way available where the emergency arises on the day of or the night before the interview (so neither the notification from calling the National Contact Center nor the request from a mailed letter will arrive before the interview)?  It is very helpful when the SAFO letter acknowledging the mailed request to reschedule is sent out quickly.**

First, it is highly recommended that applicants create a USCIS account. If a true emergency happens on the day of the interview or the night before, Tina Almond said an email may be sent to her. Tina.M.Almond@uscis.dhs.gov. Please do not send routine requests!

1. **Since COVID, the Interview Notices have provided for telephonic representation.  Will this option continue indefinitely?**

At this time, the SAFO has no information about a change to this.

1. **Would SAFO be amenable to providing an official, written response to legal service provider questions?**

No

Other information shared:

If issues arise during an interview, ask to speak with a Supervisor. Do this on the day of the interview. The Supervisor needs to know who the officer was.

Please use email for Tina Almond only for out-of-the-ordinary situations. Do not send routine requests or ask for case status to her email address.