

**United States Senate
Committee on the Judiciary
March 12, 2014**

**Statement of Leon Rodriguez, Nominee for Director – United States Citizenship and
Immigration Services (USCIS)**

Chairman Leahy, Ranking Member Grassley, Esteemed Members of the Judiciary Committee:

It is a great honor to be sitting before you today. I am here today as a member of the first in three generations of my family that has been able to live his adult life in the country where I was born. My grandparents fled anti-Semitism and poverty in Turkey and Poland in the late teens and early 20's to come to Cuba where my parents were born. Within a generation, my parents were fleeing the oppressive Castro regime in Cuba and seeking a fresh start in our wonderful country. I have been blessed to be able to raise my own family here, and I have the pleasure this morning of being accompanied by my wife Jill Schwartz, a research physician and my beautiful children, Talia and Elias.

I am an ardent patriot, one who believes that we are defined as Americans by the belief that there is always a new frontier to be reached, and that any wrong can and should be righted. I was raised in a family where two values mattered, devotion to family and to hard work – for me, these also form the essence of what it means to be an American.

With this personal history, I could think of no better opportunity than to lead the agency that extends the hand of welcome to new Americans and that works to ensure that those who wish us harm are not welcomed in our country.

As we continue to engage in the urgent national conversation about the future of immigration policy, the nation must have confidence that the leadership of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services has both the right abilities and values. That leadership must understand and be devoted to the nation's immigration laws – and bring the kind of judgment, work ethic, and talent needed to run an agency of

18,500 dedicated men and women that on any given day welcomes an average of 3,400 naturalized citizens, including a number bravely serving in our armed services, and otherwise adjudicates a daily average of 28,400 applications for immigration benefits.

I have been fortunate to have a varied and successful career in both government and the private sector that I believe uniquely prepares me for this important post. The first thirteen years of my career were spent as a state and federal prosecutor in three different offices. As an Assistant District Attorney in Brooklyn, New York assigned to investigate organized crime cases, and as a health care and white collar fraud prosecutor in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, I learned how to investigate violent criminal conspiracies and to detect even the most carefully concealed frauds. I believe these skills will serve me well as the head of an agency dedicated safeguarding the integrity of our immigration system. As a civil rights prosecutor in the U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, I led one of the early prosecutions of enslavement of migrant agricultural workers.

I have also held a variety of leadership positions in both federal and local government. As County Attorney for Montgomery County, Maryland, I counseled our police chief and County Executive as we sought to guarantee public safety and develop common-sense community policing policies. Now, as the Director of the Department of Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights, I have lead the transformation of an agency that among other responsibilities, enforces the nation's health information privacy laws, which I know are of significant interest and importance to the members of this Committee. During my tenure, we have established the Office for Civil Rights as a respected enforcement presence in the health information technology sector, adapted our internal business processes to meet ever-growing intake volumes, while at the same time adhering to a high-impact enforcement model that ensures that the most important cases are handled timely and effectively. We have for the first time ever created a national basic skills academy for civil rights investigators that has been attended by

investigators from numerous agencies throughout the federal government. As I prepare for the opportunity to bring these skills to USCIS, I see several critical challenges that lie ahead:

- 1) Ensuring the integrity of all of USCIS' programs, by conducting the adjudication of immigration benefits in a manner that protects the American people from violence and from economic harm.
- 2) Continuing and completing the modernization of USCIS's business processes.
- 3) Providing expert advice on immigration policy matters to the Executive branch and to the Congress, as we all work to find solutions that honor our tradition as a land of opportunity and as a refuge for the persecuted.

If confirmed, I pledge to you that I will work diligently with this Committee to be responsive to your requests.

As the son and grandson of immigrants, who understands and loves the special promise of the United States of America, and as an experienced prosecutor and government agency leader I understand the need for an honest and efficient immigration adjudication process. If confirmed, I look forward to embracing this important challenge. Thank you so much for affording me the opportunity to address you today and to pursue this tremendous opportunity to serve the American people. I humbly and respectfully ask for your favorable consideration of my nomination.