

# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6275

April 22, 2026

Orice Williams Brown  
Acting Comptroller General of the United States  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Acting Comptroller General Williams Brown:

Our lawful immigration system is largely administered by the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and the State Department. Under the current Administration, both agencies have made sweeping changes to immigration processing, indefinitely pausing processing for millions of applicants. We are deeply concerned that these changes—which have left immigrants, their families, and employers at a loss for how to obtain or maintain lawful status or presence—are an attempt to circumvent the statutory scheme for lawful immigration to the United States, rather than a legitimate exercise in improving the integrity of our immigration system.

In November 2025, USCIS placed an indefinite hold on the entire affirmative asylum process, affecting 1.4 million pending applications.<sup>1</sup> USCIS has also put on hold the adjudication of benefits—such as adjustment of status, employment authorization, and naturalization—for any individual who was born in or is a national of one of 39 countries or the Palestinian Territories, many of whom are already living and working in the United States.<sup>2</sup> USCIS has also issued guidance that national origin or country of nationality may be a significant negative factor in the adjudication of discretionary benefit requests, including applications for lawful permanent residence.<sup>3</sup> Separately, in January 2026, the State Department announced an indefinite hold on immigrant visa processing for nationals of 75 countries, citing a high risk that individuals from those countries will become public charges.<sup>4</sup> Finally, both USCIS and the State Department have indefinitely held applications associated with the congressionally authorized Diversity Visa program.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Policy Memorandum, *Hold and Review of all Pending Asylum Applications and all USCIS Benefit Applications Filed by Aliens from High-Risk Countries*, PM-602-0192 (Dec. 2, 2025), <https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/policy-alerts/PM-602-0192-PendingApplicationsHighRiskCountries-20251202.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> USCIS Policy Memorandum, *Hold and Review of USCIS Benefit Applications Filed by Aliens from Additional High-Risk Countries*, PM-602-0194 (Jan. 1, 2026), <https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/policy-alerts/PM-602-0194-PendingApplicationsAdditionalHighRiskCountries-20260101.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> USCIS Policy Alert, *Impact of INA 212(f) on USCIS' Adjudication of Discretionary Benefits*, PA-2025-26 (Nov. 27, 2025), <https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/policy-manual-updates/20251127-Discretion.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Department of State, *Immigrant Visa Processing Updates for Nationalities at High Risk of U.S. Public Benefits Reliance* (last updated, Feb. 2, 2026), <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/News/visas-news/immigrant-visa-processing-updates-for-nationalities-at-high-risk-of-public-benefits-usage.html>.

<sup>5</sup> USCIS Policy Memorandum, *Hold and Review of Pending USCIS Adjustment of Status Applications Filed by Aliens Under the Diversity Immigrant Visa Program*, PM-602-0193 (Dec. 19, 2025),

USCIS recently noted that it had lifted holds on certain populations, including Afrikaner refugees, without a clear explanation for the basis for lifting the hold for some populations and not others.<sup>6</sup> Members of the public, including immigrants and their families, continue to lack clarity on what steps USCIS and the State Department are taking to resume their normal adjudicative missions. As a result, we request that the Government Accountability Office examine the following:

1. What does USCIS and State Department data indicate about the number and characteristics of immigration requests subject to each hold in processing? Please disaggregate available data by the applicable hold or pause in processing, national origin and citizenship, form type, filing date, and number of principal versus derivative beneficiaries.
2. How are the holds being implemented? Does USCIS continue to process applications subject to holds? If so, how many immigration requests subject to holds have been adjudicated and determined to meet criteria for approval but for the applicable hold?
3. Please disaggregate available data by the applicable hold or pause in processing, national origin and citizenship, form type, filing date, and number of principal versus derivative beneficiaries. With respect to each hold in processing, what evidence did USCIS and the State Department consider to determine that the above-mentioned adjudicative holds were necessary?
  - Did USCIS and the State Department consider alternative processes to completely pausing or holding adjudications to address potential national security, public safety, overstay, and fraud concerns?
  - To what extent did these agencies analyze potential national security, public safety, overstay, and fraud concerns prior to implementing these pauses or holds?
4. What country-specific risk factors have USCIS and the State Department identified, and what analysis was conducted to ensure that the risk factors relate to the fraud, public safety, or national security threat that an immigration requestor may present to the United States?
5. What evidence did USCIS consider to determine that national origin and/or citizenship constitute negative discretionary criteria, and to what extent did USCIS analyze potential national security, public safety, overstay, and fraud concerns prior to implementing guidance regarding the new discretionary criteria?

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<https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/memos/PM-602-0193-DiversityVisaHolds-20251219.pdf>;  
Department of State, *Diversity Visa Issuance Updated Guidance* (Dec. 23, 2025),  
<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/News/visas-news/diversity-visa-issuance-updated-guidance.html>.

<sup>6</sup> USCIS, *Update on USCIS' Strengthened Screening and Vetting* (Mar. 30, 2026),  
<https://www.uscis.gov/newsroom/alerts/update-on-uscis-strengthened-screening-and-vetting>.

6. What Artificial Intelligence (AI) or other electronic tools has USCIS used to identify cases? What parameters (e.g., national origin, filing date, etc.) were used when deploying AI or other electronic tools? Which USCIS systems were these tools used in?
7. What does USCIS data indicate about USCIS responses, such as requests for evidence, notices of intent to terminate or deny, and denials, that were issued based on these criteria? What does the data indicate about USCIS responses based on form type and the national origin and/or citizenship of the individual for whom benefits are being sought?
8. What evidence did the State Department consider to determine that immigrants from 75 countries were at high risk of becoming a public charge, and to what extent did the Department consider other options to address that potential risk? To what extent did the Department take steps to ensure that it was considering exceptions to the public charge ground of inadmissibility prior to implementing the hold?
9. Were the triggers for pauses or holds in processing internal (e.g., USCIS Fraud Detection and National Security Directorate (FDNS) findings, component/directorate referrals) or external (e.g., White House, DHS, congressional inquiries)?
10. What does USCIS and the State Department data indicate about how much has been collected in fees from immigration requests subject to pauses or holds in processing? Please disaggregate this information by form type subject to the hold, the national origin and/or citizenship of the individual subject to a hold, and whether the requests are pending or have received a final adjudication.
11. USCIS has indicated that it will “continue to review all application types and lift holds for both individual and group cases as appropriate.”<sup>7</sup> To what extent has USCIS developed and implemented a plan for resuming normal adjudication processes? What are the process and criteria for determining which application (or petition) types will have a hold lifted, and how are those criteria being applied? What, if any, timetables have been established?
12. To what extent has the State Department developed and implemented a plan for resuming normal adjudication processes? What is that plan, including applicable criteria and timetables?
13. What process is in place to grant exceptions to the adjudications hold? For example, what is the process in place to continue processing benefit requests filed by aliens whose entry would serve a United States national interest, and what notice was given to the public of this process?

We look forward to working with you on this inquiry.

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<sup>7</sup> USCIS, *Update on USCIS’ Strengthened Screening and Vetting* (Mar. 30. 2026), <https://www.uscis.gov/newsroom/alerts/update-on-uscis-strengthened-screening-and-vetting>.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin  
Ranking Member



Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator



Alex Padilla  
Ranking Member, Judiciary  
Subcommittee on Border  
Security and Immigration



Sheldon Whitehouse  
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker  
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Peter Welch  
United States Senator



Adam B. Schiff  
United States Senator