



Office of the Citizenship and  
Immigration Services Ombudsman

Working to improve the immigration benefits process



**CIS Ombudsman's Webinar Series:  
Joint Webinar with USCIS on the One-Year  
Anniversary of the Humanitarian, Adjustment,  
Removing Conditions, and Travel Documents  
(HART) Service Center**



April 30, 2024

Working to improve the immigration benefits process



Citizenship and  
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# Webinar materials

The materials from today's webinar will be posted online on our Public Engagement page ([www.dhs.gov/outreach](http://www.dhs.gov/outreach)):

- Readout summarizing the webinar
- Presentation

Office of the Citizenship and  
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**Nathan Stiefel**  
**Acting CIS Ombudsman**




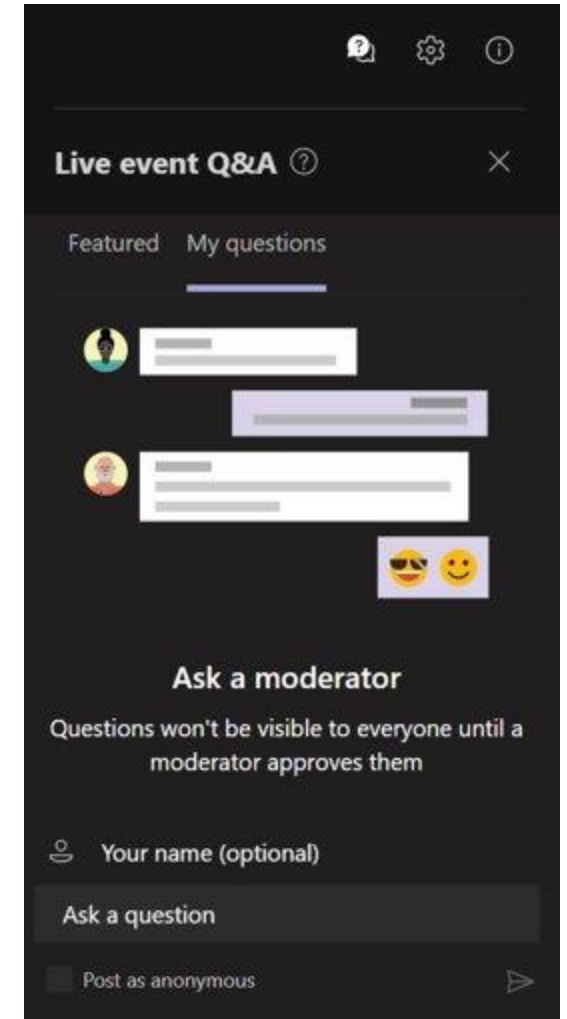
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- Submit written questions and feedback to us through the Q&A panel on the right side of your screen
- Select the **Q&A icon**  at the top of your screen to open or close the Q&A panel
- We will review every question submitted and determine if we can answer it today
- You can also email us any questions or comments at: [CISOmbudsman.publicaffairs@hq.dhs.gov](mailto:CISOmbudsman.publicaffairs@hq.dhs.gov)



# Speakers

- Nathan Stiefel, acting CIS Ombudsman
- Ciro Parascandola, chief of Public Engagement, Office of the CIS Ombudsman
- Connie Bae, chief of staff, USCIS Service Center Operations
- Jonathan Micale, acting director of HART, USCIS
- Laurie Goudge, acting deputy director of HART, USCIS
- Jennifer Mickey, chief of staff of HART, USCIS

# Overview



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HART is the 6<sup>th</sup> service center within SCOPS and has been adjudicating since January 29, 2023

- 100% virtual service center
- No geographical location
- Across multiple time zones
- Uses existing service centers for support with a hybrid approach
- Allocated positions increased from 480 to 481 with the addition of a permanent chief of staff



# Overview (cont.)



Currently, the HART Service Center exclusively processes the following case types:

- **Form I-360 VAWA** (Petition for Amerasian, Widow(er), or Special Immigrant) based on Violence Against Women Act
- **Form I-601A** (Application for Provisional Unlawful Presence Waiver)
- **Form I-730** (Refugee/Asylee Relative Petition)
- **Form I-918 BFD** (U Visa Bona Fide Determination)

# Overview (cont.)

## HART Service Center: Year 1

- Staffing
- Training
- Completions
- Processing times



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# Year 1 - Staffing



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Hiring and onboarding new employees is a priority.

- January 2023: 150 SCOPS employees reassigned to HART.
- Successfully met FY23 goal of 60-85% staffed and on target to reach its goal of being 95-98% staffed by the end of FY24.
- Fully onboarded 379 employees, with an additional 34 selected employees waiting for their start date.

# Year 1 - Training



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## Training is another priority for the HART Service Center

- 322 employees have completed training related to HART Service Center operations, including 251 officers.
- Some workloads require specialized training including victimization awareness, domestic violence, special confidentiality protections, vicarious trauma, and statutory and regulatory eligibility requirements.
- Many initial HART Service Center employees were reassigned to HART from other service centers due to their knowledge and experience with the HART Service Center adjudicated form types

# Year 1 – Training (cont.)



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- Officers new to USCIS must attend and pass Immigration Services Officer BASIC training with the USCIS Academy Training Center within their first year of employment.
- 65 HART officers have either completed BASIC training or are currently attending, and 53 officers are scheduled to attend.

# Year 1 - Completions



We are already seeing some promising preliminary results of adjudicative completions.

- On track to exceed or have already exceeded our adjudicative completions for fiscal year 2023.
- We anticipate continued success in this regard as we continue to onboard and train additional staff for the foreseeable future.



# Year 1 – Processing Times



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- We didn't anticipate processing times improvement in the first year because our resources were focused on hiring, training while also working pending filings.
- We also anticipated that our processing times would slip before they got better because the resources used to onboard and train employees are the same resources who adjudicate and support adjudicative functions.
- While this foundation building was our main focus, we did make modest improvements in our Form I-730 Follow-to-Join Asylee workload.
- It's important to note that our processing times are really just one part of what goes into measuring our adjudicative progress.

# Trends

- I-360 VAWA
- I-601A
- I-730 Follow-to-Join Asylee
- I-918 U BFD



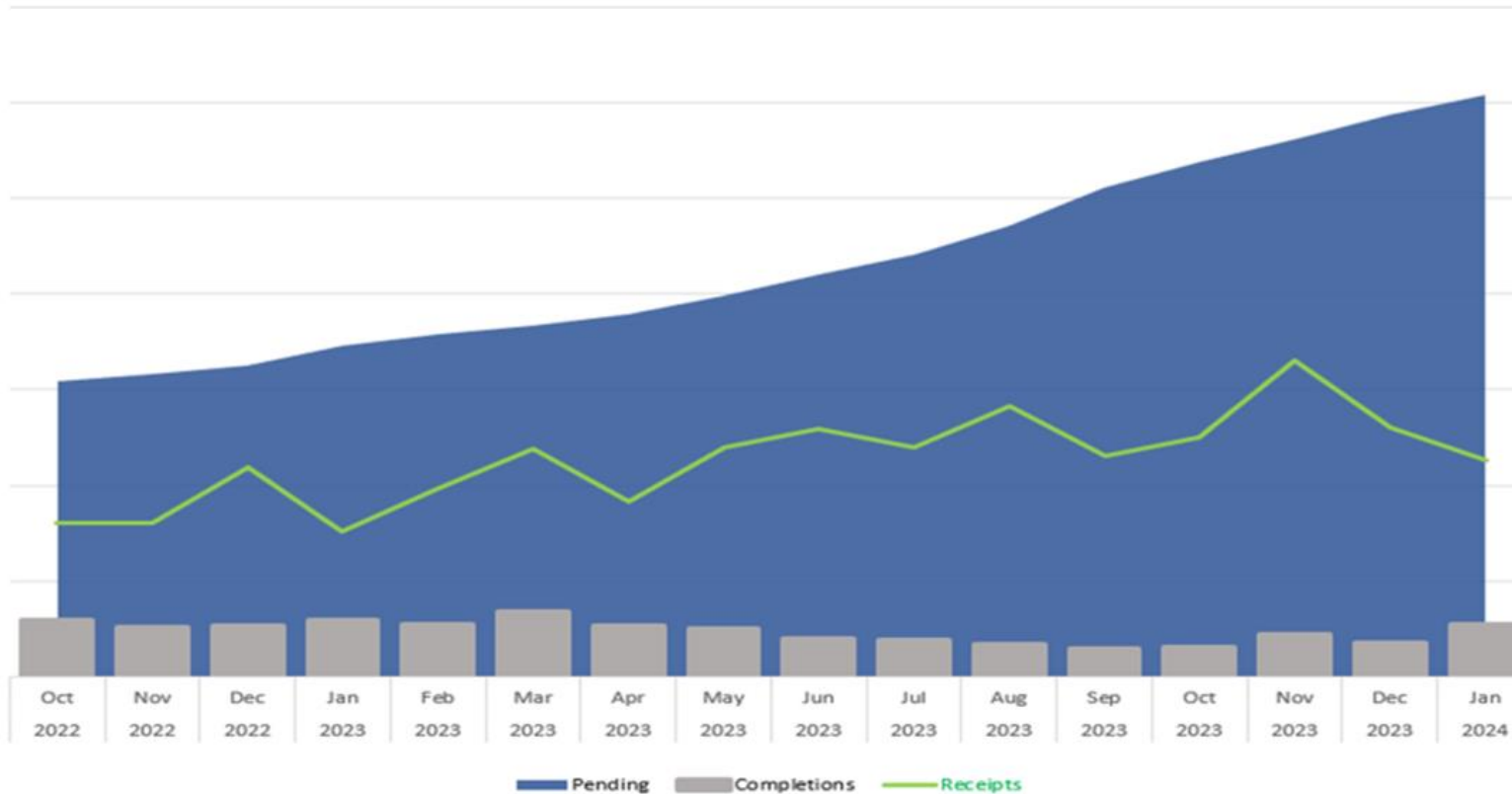
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# Trends – I-360 VAWA



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- This workload requires additional training on the dynamics of domestic violence, special confidentiality protections, vicarious trauma, and statutory and regulatory eligibility requirements.
- Many recent employees to onboard and train have been assigned to Form I-360 VAWA.

# Trends – I-601A



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- A significant portion of new employees were trained on Form I-601A.
- Due to scanning efforts, the Form I-601A workload is mostly electronic. This has allowed us to train Form I-730 HART officers on Form I-601A, and now those officers can adjudicate Form I-601A when Form I-730 adjudicative-ready work is minimal.
- Ability to steadily increase completions has allowed us to start chipping away at our backlog since September 2023. As our officers become more experienced and proficient, we will continue to build progress and anticipate seeing those results through FY 2024.

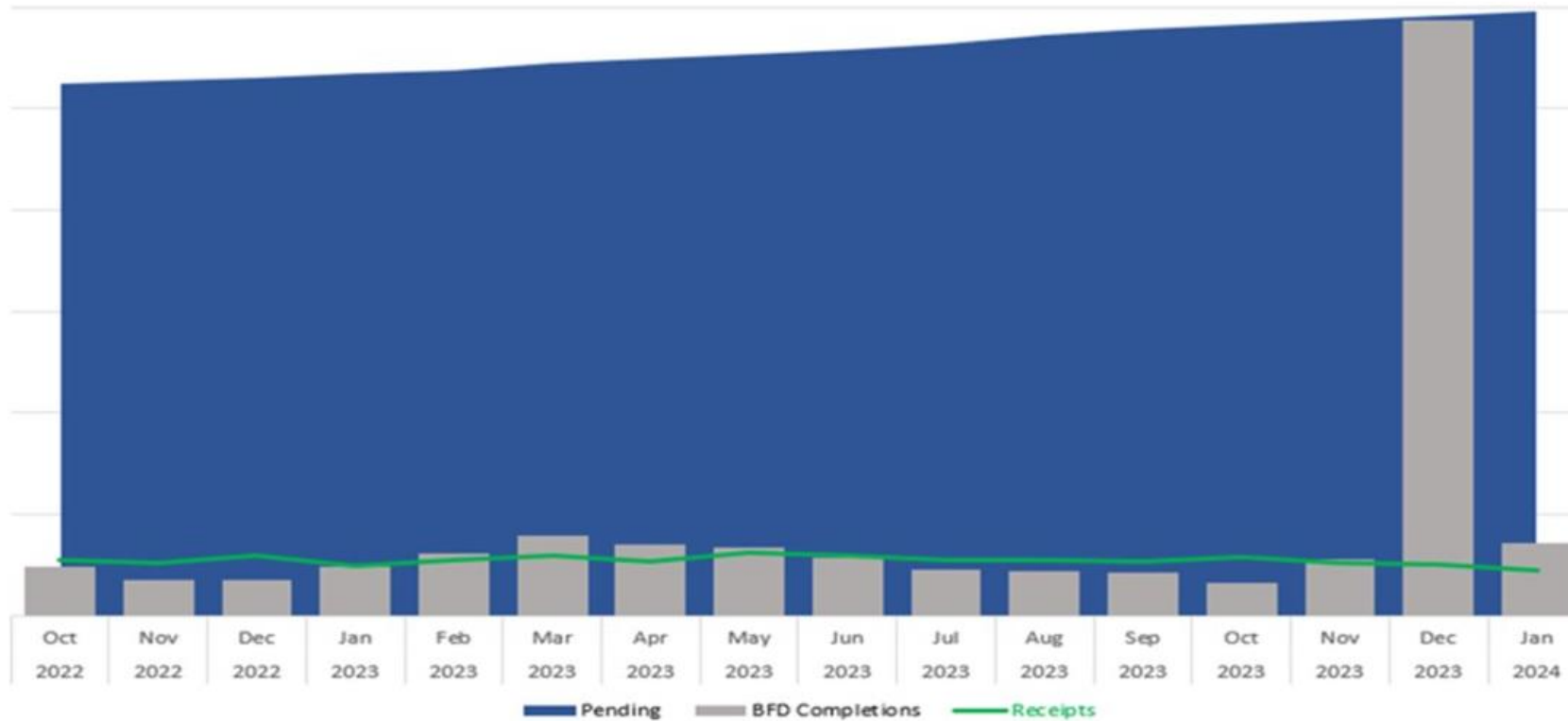
# Trends – I-730 Follow-to-Join Asylee



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- The I-730 workload is complex because multiple USCIS directorates adjudicate this form.
- While the Texas Service Center intakes all I-730 applications for USCIS, HART only adjudicates the Follow-to-Join Asylee workload (FTJ-A).
- HART expends many hours completing upfront work for the other Form I-730 workloads before transferring to another directorate for adjudication.
- Thanks to a HART initiative to properly identify which cases were within HART's purview to adjudicate, we greatly reduced our backlog of Forms I-730 FTJ-A pending over 90 days.
  - At the end of this initiative, there were only about 500 adjudication-ready cases for our Form I-730 officers, giving us an opportunity to cross-train them in Form I-601A.
  - This flexibility is the result of working from an electronic environment and allows us to shift to better address both workloads.

# Trends – I-918 U BFD



- I-918 bona fide determination is gaining traction by employing efficiencies to review more petitions.

# Question 1

HART is a virtual center, but in USCIS' March 27 engagement, the agency said that it has used some physical locations for file transfer and similar activities.

What impact does that have, if any, on adjudication processes and timelines? When do you anticipate that the center will be fully remote?

## Question 2

While HART has sole jurisdiction over certain form types, it seems there are currently no processing times listed for the HART Service Center.

When will USCIS identify processing times for the forms adjudicated at HART that are currently posted elsewhere?

# Question 2

Form \*

I-601A | Application for Provisional Unlawful Presence Waiver

Form Category \*

Provisional Waiver of Unlawful Presence

Field Office or Service Center \*

All Service Centers

Get processing time

## Processing time for Application for Provisional Unlawful Presence Waiver (I-601A) at All Service Centers

80% of cases are completed within

**43.5**  
Months

[Check your case status](#) to track the status of an immigration application, petition, or request.

### Notes

As of Jan. 29, 2023, the Humanitarian, Adjustment, Removing Conditions and Travel Documents (HART) Service Center is the only service center processing this form type. The posted processing time listed on this page includes all HART completions.

### What does this processing time mean?

We generally process cases in the order we receive them. This processing time is based on how long it took us to complete 80% of adjudicated cases over the past six months. Each case is unique, and some cases may take longer than others. Processing times should be used as a reference point, not an absolute measure of how long your case will take to be completed.

[Learn more about processing times.](#)

### When can I ask about my case?

Many routine factors impact how quickly a case is processed. We only allow inquiries for cases that are well outside the processing time listed above.

[Learn more about the Case Inquiry Date.](#)



# Question 3

What benefits does USCIS gain from having a virtual center?  
How does the agency hope to capitalize on these benefits?



## Question 4

With all of the onboarding USCIS has done, how do you successfully train staff while minimizing the impact on processing times?

# Question 5

Is there a dedicated phone line or email address where external stakeholders can directly contact HART?

## Question 6

Has HART assumed responsibility for managing the email boxes dedicated to those protected under certain statutory confidentiality protections?

If not, will that happen? And if so, when will they be transferred from the Vermont and Nebraska Service Centers?

# Question 7

What is the most efficient way for applicants and petitioners with pending cases at HART to ensure their addresses are updated in a timely manner?

## Question 8

Does USCIS have any tips to help an attorney that is new to a pending case and wants to follow up with USCIS on their client's case?

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## Questions and Answers

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# Contact USCIS



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- For additional questions, please email [public.engagement@uscis.dhs.gov](mailto:public.engagement@uscis.dhs.gov).
- For more information on our national engagements, visit [uscis.gov/outreach](https://uscis.gov/outreach).
- Follow us on [X\(formerly Twitter\)](#), [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#), [Facebook](#), and [LinkedIn](#).

# Contact the CIS Ombudsman

- **Website:** [dhs.gov/cisombudsman](https://dhs.gov/cisombudsman)
- **Phone:** 1-855-882-8100 (toll free) or 1-202-357-8100 (local)
- **For questions about case assistance requests:** [cisombudsman@hq.dhs.gov](mailto:cisombudsman@hq.dhs.gov)
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# Thank you!

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