

A Message from the Ombudsman



It is an honor to present to you the Citizenship and Immigration Services Ombudsman's 2013 Annual Report. This Report describes the work of the Ombudsman, including the key issues and areas of study we have addressed over the year.

As we finalize this Annual Report, we are closely following bipartisan comprehensive immigration reform — the first such legislation that Congress has considered in many years. If enacted, many individuals currently residing in the United States or waiting in long visa backlogs abroad will be able to submit applications for immigration benefits to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). The challenge for USCIS will be significant, and the Ombudsman's Office stands ready to support implementation by assisting individuals and employers who encounter problems during that process.

During this past year, USCIS implemented the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. DACA illustrates the agency's ability to develop quickly and successfully a new application and an adjudicatory process accompanied by wide-reaching outreach and education. The agency is to be commended for its effective operational response, public engagement, and interagency work to achieve a common understanding of DACA-related policy and procedures. This type of rapid and comprehensive response will be essential to successful implementation of immigration reform.

At this moment in our nation's immigration history, we recognize the 10-year anniversary of the Office of the Citizenship and Immigration Services Ombudsman. We measure our success, in great part, by the trust placed in us by thousands of individuals and employers who have sought to resolve long delayed or complex cases pending before USCIS. Whether assisting a member of the military seeking relief for a spouse; an immigrant entrepreneur applying to start a new business in this country; a refugee awaiting processing in a dangerous overseas camp; or a long-term permanent resident applying to naturalize, the Ombudsman's Office plays a vital role helping to ensure our government delivers immigration services commensurate with our heritage as a nation of immigrants.

Good government is grounded in a steadfast commitment to efficiency, transparency, and accountability. But sometimes, despite dedicated efforts, government fails to deliver its best, leaving the public to suffer hardship that requires the involvement of a neutral third party. As an office of last resort, the Citizenship and Immigration Services Ombudsman plays that role, working arduously to ensure that individuals applying for an immigration benefit can experience government at its best. We are problem solvers, focused on assisting one case at a time and delivering policy recommendations throughout the year to improve efficiency and fairness in the administration of immigration benefits. Our success is directly related to working as an ally with our partner agency, USCIS, to deliver high-quality service.

It is through meaningful collaboration with Director Alejandro Mayorkas and his team that we have been able to make a difference for the individuals we serve. I thank Director Mayorkas for his leadership and continued positive engagement with our office. My appreciation also extends to the USCIS officers across the country for their expertise and commitment to delivering exemplary immigration services. I would also like to thank Secretary Janet Napolitano and Congress for supporting our work. Finally, I would like to thank my team for their quiet, yet incredibly effective, assistance to the individuals and employers we serve. I often say, "If you want to experience outstanding customer service in government, come visit the Ombudsman's Office." We welcome you to engage with us and learn more about our work.

Many of us respond to the call to public service because we believe that in every branch of government we can contribute meaningfully to our great democracy. Throughout my career, I have had the privilege to touch every sector in the field of immigration: charitable, government, and the private practice of law. Through those experiences I have learned that protecting the integrity and improving the efficiency and quality of the immigration system serves both country and immigrant alike. I embrace the honor and immense responsibility to serve as the new Citizenship and Immigration Services Ombudsman.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Maria M. Odom". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Maria" being the most prominent part.

Maria M. Odom

Citizenship and Immigration Services Ombudsman