



The need for federal support to encourage immigrants to apply for and obtain U.S. citizenship

The United States is a nation of immigrants united by a common creed and shared values. With 38 million foreign-born residents,¹ the United States' strength and vitality depends on the contributions of its newest members. However, the integration of a population of this magnitude cannot be assumed. It requires national coordination and federal support. Because lawful status is central to integration, a plan to put the undocumented on a path to citizenship is also required.

Citizenship is a significant marker of immigrant integration and a pre-condition to full membership in our constitutional democracy. Citizenship can serve as a catalyst for immigrants to become more dedicated to democratic principles, more informed about American history, more proficient in English, and better positioned to make positive contributions to our society. Despite this, there are currently more than 8 million lawful permanent residents who are eligible to naturalize, but have not yet applied to do so.² High naturalization application fees, our nation's complex immigration laws, and a lack of quality and affordable legal services to assist immigrants with the naturalization application process conspire to create significant obstacles to obtaining citizenship. These factors argue for federal support to encourage eligible immigrants to become U.S. citizens.

The Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC) is the nation's largest charitable agency representing the legal immigration needs of newcomers. CLINIC provides training and support to legal staff that provide direct legal services, including naturalization application assistance, in 270 offices in 48 states. Each year our network serves more than 600,000 immigrants.

Outreach, ESL and civics education, and quality legal representation and naturalization application assistance, especially for populations that are difficult to naturalize such as the elderly, disabled, low-income, and those with minimal literacy skills, are essential to ensuring that eligible U.S. residents apply for and obtain U.S. citizenship.

Federal funding to allow non-profit agencies to provide the following services to immigrants who are on a path to lawful permanent resident status would assist in achieving meaningful immigrant integration:

- Citizenship information and educational materials;
- ESL and citizenship classes;
- Outreach regarding citizenship services, the naturalization process, and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship;
- Naturalization application assistance;
- Training and technical assistance to charitable organizations providing ESL-citizenship classes and naturalization assistance.

This could be accomplished by giving the Office of Citizenship, within U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, grant making authority and appropriations to fund non-profit agencies to provide the services listed above. By investing in and working with organizations to naturalize 8 million permanent residents, the federal government helps to build the charitable legal services infrastructure that will be instrumental in providing legal assistance to any population covered by a future legalization program. In addition, by collaborating with charitable, community-based organizations that have already established extensive and trusted relationships with the immigrant community, the federal government optimizes its resources.

For more details, see CLINIC's report, *A More Perfect Union: A National Citizenship Plan*. Available at <http://www.cliniclegal.org/DNP/citzplan.html>.

¹ Migration Policy Institute. See http://www.migrationinformation.org/datahub/files/MPIDataHub_ACS_2007-NumberForeignBorn.xls

² Pew Hispanic Center. See <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/74.pdf>.