

Immigrants Must Shell Out More For Immigration Services

Just when you thought it couldn't get any worse in this economic recession, immigrants are being slam dunked with more fees by the United States Citizen and Immigration Service.

Come Nov 23, 2010, immigrants seeking to sponsor a relative will have to shell out more. The agency processing fees are being raised from US\$355 to \$420. Migrants applying for travel documents will soon have to pay \$360, up from \$305.

Several other services offered by the U.S. CIS will also see increases by approximately 10 percent across the board.

Those looking to replace a Permanent Resident Card or green card will have to pay \$365, up from \$290 while employers petitioning for a worker will have to pay \$580 in processing fees, up from \$475.

Applying for an employment authorization will now cost \$380, up from \$340; biometric processing will cost \$85, up from \$80 and an Application for Certification of Citizenship/Application for Citizenship and Issuance of Certificate will cost \$600, up from \$460.

However, the fees for naturalization will remain at \$595 and the fees for the Petition for Alien Fiance'(e) has been lowered from \$455 to \$340. Additionally, the naturalization fee for some service members and certain veterans of the U.S. armed forces will be waived.

USCIS officials warn that applications or petitions postmarked or otherwise filed on or after this date must include the new fee, or they will be rejected. The agency blamed low fee revenue in fiscal years 2008 and 2009 which left a gap between costs and anticipated revenue and added that the increase in budget cuts of approximately \$160 million has not bridged the remaining gap.

USCIS, officials reminded, is a primarily fee-based organization, with about 90 percent of its budget coming from fees paid by applicants and petitioners for immigration benefits. Under U.S. immigration law, the agency is required to conduct fee reviews every two years to determine the funding levels necessary to administer the nation's immigration laws, process immigration benefit requests and provide the infrastructure needed to support those activities. The final fee rule concludes a comprehensive review begun in 2009.

The news comes as USCIS announced it has begun issuing a redesigned, more secure Certificate of Naturalization (Form N-550) as part of its ongoing efforts to enhance the integrity of the immigration system. The agency anticipates that over 600,000 new citizens will receive the enhanced certificate over the next year.

The Certificate of Naturalization serves as evidence of citizenship for immigrants who become naturalized under U.S. immigration laws. You receive it after taking the Oath of Allegiance to the United States. Citizenship qualifies you to vote and travel with a U.S. passport, among other rights. In many instances, a Certificate of Naturalization is accepted as a valid form of identification.

The previous Certificates of Naturalization featured hard-copy photos of the candidates. The redesigned certificate features the naturalization candidate's digitized photo and signature embedded into the base document. The naturalization candidate's digitized photo and signature are embedded in the security-enhanced certificate. Its background features a color-shifting ink pattern that is difficult to recreate.

Additionally, USCIS will use a more secure printing process, making it more tamper-proof.

While all new citizens will receive the redesigned, security-enhanced certificate, certain, limited categories of naturalization candidates, including overseas military and homebound candidates, will receive documents with hard-copy photos affixed to their certificates.

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