

San Mateo County Immigrant Forum
Meeting Notes
5/21/2020

1. Welcome & Introductions – Immigrant Services Team

- a. Thank you to all for joining us on Zoom. The Immigrant Forum will be held virtually until further notice.

2. USCIS Updates: Nina Sachdev, Community Relations Officer

Nina.K.Sachdev@uscis.dhs.gov

- a. USCIS is and has been accepting mail and applications (mail or online)
- b. Offices locally will start re-opening as the shelter-in-place orders lift. All USCIS offices nationwide are planning to re-open on June 4th
 - Locally, June 4th will be when more employees will start coming back into the offices
- c. Naturalization Oath Ceremonies for those whose ceremony was postponed is the priority
 - People will begin to receive appointment notices for their Oath Ceremonies
- d. If people are ill, have symptoms for COVID-19 or have been exposed, they can reschedule at no penalty to them (information is on the appointment notice)
- e. Everyone should read the appointment notices closely because there are new requirements to minimize exposure:
 - Must wear face coverings
 - Bring blue or black ink pen
 - No guests at oath ceremonies unless accompanying someone with a disability
 - Limited number of people at interviews (indicated on the appointment notice)
- f. The Application Support Centers that conduct the biometrics appointments will have their own timeline for re-opening because they are not part of USCIS
- g. Contact Nina at SFSJ.CommunityRelations@uscis.dhs.gov for questions
- h. Q/A
 - Q: What is the timeframe for N-400 applications at this moment?
A: On average, it takes about 7.5 months, but now it can take up to 17 months

3. Legal Updates: ILRC

- a. Health Care
 - The CARES Act expands access to free testing, increases funding for community health centers by 1.3 billion for FY 20 and 668 million for FY 21 and creates a fund to reimburse health centers for costs associated

with responding to the COVID-19 crisis. It is also important to note that while the bill does not explicitly state this, USCIS issued guidance stating that people who seek testing or treatment for COVID-19, even if it is through a state Medicaid expansion or exception, will not be penalized under the public charge rule. This also includes preventative care if a vaccine becomes available in the future.

- What is missing?
 - The CARES Act expands the availability of testing but does not cover the cost of treatment
 - Does not change Medicaid eligibility, many immigrants still do not qualify
 - Some states have expanded their definitions of “medical emergency” to include COVID-19 so that uninsured members of the community can access emergency Medicaid
 - Does not include any language limiting ICE authority to carry out enforcement near community health centers and hospitals

b. Cash Stimulus

- The CARES Act created a cash stimulus program that allows for the issuance of a one-time \$1,200 payment for each adult in a tax filing unit, and \$500 dollars for each dependent. All family members in the tax filing unit must have a valid social security number. The government is reviewing either 2018 or 2019 tax filings (if they have already been filed) to review social security numbers for eligibility. In order to receive the stimulus check all members must meet the IRS definition of “resident alien”. Taxpayers are not required to apply, and there is no system for submitting an application. It is anticipated that these stimulus checks will be issued in April 2020. The receipt of a stimulus check will not be counted as an adverse factor in a public charge determination.
- What is missing?
 - The CARES Act does not allow for issuance of stimulus checks to individuals who file taxes using an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN)
 - The CARES Act excludes families if all members of the family do not have a valid social security number. Families with mixed-immigration status will be excluded from this benefit with one narrow exception for families where one adult served in the military in 2019
 - If you do not file taxes or receive social security benefits, like many low-income or homeless families, you will not be able to apply for the benefit
 - This is a one-time payment and does not provide long-term relief for families

c. Heroes Act

- The Heroes Act has only been voted on in the House of Representatives, has not been signed into law
- On May 15th, 2020 the House of Representatives voted on the next COVID-19 aid package called the HEROES act. Here is a brief summary of some of the key immigration provisions:
- Includes:
 - o Virtual oath ceremonies for naturalization applicants who have complied with all other requirements for naturalization
 - o Extension of Employment Authorization Documents for DACA and TPS holders
 - o Expansion of Medicaid eligibility to cover testing/treatment for coronavirus regardless of immigration status
 - o Cash stimulus benefit for immigrants filing taxes using an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number
 - o No additional funds for ICE and CBP
 - o Includes language stating that Byrne/JAG grants cannot be conditioned on cooperation with ICE
- Detention:
 - o Mandates ICE to review files of individuals in detention with major exceptions for those subject to mandatory detention OR those who are viewed as a threat to public safety or national security
 - o Free soap and sanitary supplies
 - o Free phone calls, including confidential calls to counsel
- What is missing?
 - o Any amendment/rescission of the public charge rule
 - o Prohibition on enforcement near sensitive locations where people may seek testing or treatment for COVID-19, such as community health centers or hospitals
 - o Funding for broader language access

d. Outside of Legislation

- Borders are effectively closed
- Ban on folks entering and applying for asylum, allegedly due to coronavirus concerns, was just extended
- Sadly, looks like many people deported from US to Central America had coronavirus, leading to spikes in cases there
- Supreme Court:
 - o No news on DACA yet. Keep renewing in meantime!

4. Agency Update Roundtable

- a. **Office of Community Affairs:** San Mateo County is still leading California in response rates at 70%. US Census Bureau is hiring and Spanish speakers are priority
 - **Update: Almost 72% now**
- b. **Multicultural Institute:** Virtual outreach daily. Continues to help with Census.
- c. **CCS:** Prior to the change in phone # by Catholic Charities, no families were able to get assistance with the cash relief. LPCH reported all 40 families they were working with were unable to get through. CCS had same feedback. With new phone #, families are able to call and start application process. Regarding Samaritan House, as of 1-2 weeks ago they were out of diapers. We're checking to see if that has changed. We're resorting to collecting from co-workers voluntary contributions to help out families we serve with resources that are unavailable
- d. **LIBRE:** legalaidsmc.org/covid19; waiting to hear about SMC Eviction Moratorium
 - **Update: SMC Eviction Moratorium extended until June 30th**
- e. **CLSEPA:** 2nd Thursday of every month: telephonic immigration consultations (next one is June 11th). DACA clinics continue to happen
- f. **Red Cross:** Millbrae Fire displaced 62 individuals (mostly Latinos/immigrants) – HSA/City of Millbrae stepped up and put residents in hotel. Disasters continue to happen and because of COVID-19, there are new processes to keep people safe
- g. **BHRS:** Coastside Parent Cafés have been successful. New flyers coming out soon
- h. **CORA:** First all-remote DV training July 28th; June 8th certification class. Visit corasupport.org/covid19
- i. **Primary School:** In contact with 200 families; each family has a coach (60% of families are immigrants)
- j. **Puente:** Continues to help with rental assistance, Medi-Cal apps, food distribution sites, Census. Parade for workers. Offices are open but only accepting limited people at a time