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United States Senate

December 10, 2019

The Honorable Chad Wolf
Acting Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

The Honorable Kenneth T. Cuccinelli
Acting Director
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
20 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20529

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf and Acting Director Cuccinelli:

I am concerned about the Department's November 14, 2019 proposed rule to raise fees significantly for the Genealogy Program administered by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

The Genealogy Program is essential for genealogists, family historians, and other researchers who acquire citizenship and alien records of deceased immigrants who arrived in the United States between the late 19th and mid-20th centuries. These records allow Americans to trace their roots for a better understanding of who they are, and where they came from.

Any increase in the Genealogy Program's two separate user fees should be done after careful consideration that it would not unduly burden those who rely on the records. The Genealogy Index Search Request (search fee) is used to determine whether USCIS possesses any records on the requested immigrant and, if such records exist, to capture the identifier of each record. The second fee is the Genealogy Records Request (records fee), which is used to obtain copies of USCIS's historical records.

When the Genealogy Program began in 2008, its initial fees ranged from just \$20 to \$35. In 2016, USCIS raised both fees to \$65. DHS's proposed rule would raise the search fee 269% from \$65 to \$240, and the records fee 492% from \$65 to \$385. If this rule takes effect, a family historian would need to pay \$625 to search and obtain a single file on a relative.

I understand USCIS's budget relies primarily on user fees, and the southern border crisis continues to strain the agency's ability to fulfill its mission. However, we I am concerned that drastically raising the Genealogy Program's fees would harm genealogists across the United States without addressing your budgetary concerns. While interest has grown over the last few years, genealogy research remains primarily a hobby sensitive to financial constraints. In fact, after raising fees to \$65 in 2016, total requests fell by nearly 30%. The proposed rule's prohibitive fees could make it nearly impossible for an average person to access the Genealogy Program, leading to fewer requests and ultimately mitigating the proposed rule's intention to fund the USCIS.

With these concerns in mind, I am requesting answers to the following by no later than December 18, 2019:

1. What is the annual amount of user fees collected by the Genealogy Program from 2015-2018?
2. Please provide the budgets for the Genealogy Program from 2015-2019.
3. Please identify any changes to the Genealogy Program's expenses since 2015 and, explanations for why those expenses changed.
4. Are fees collected by the Genealogy Program used to support USCIS functions other than expenditures for the Genealogy Program?

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Mitt Romney
United States Senator