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**SENATOR ZELNOR Y. MYRIE
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December 12, 2019

Samantha Deshommes

Chief, Regulatory Coordination Division, Office of Policy and Strategy

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

20 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Mailstop #2140

Washington, DC 20529-2140

Re: USCIS Fee Schedule Rule, DHS Docket No. USCIS-2019-0010

Dear Ms. Deshommes:

I submit these comments in response to USCIS's proposed fee rule published for comment on Nov. 14, 2019 at 84 Fed. Reg. 62280. As the New York State Senator for the 20th Senatorial District in Brooklyn, I write to express my strong opposition to the proposed increase in the naturalization application fee (Form N-400), and elimination of fee waivers for various types of citizenship forms, which would have the compound effect of greatly reducing naturalization and limiting American prosperity.

I represent a wide and diverse range of neighborhoods in Brooklyn which include Crown Heights, East Flatbush, Sunset Park, Prospect Heights, Prospect Lefferts Gardens, Brownsville, Park Slope, Gowanus and South Slope. My district is very heavily immigrant with approximately 43 percent of my constituents being born abroad and largely from the Caribbean, Latin America and Asia. These substantial increases in fees would have a significant impact on the people I represent since according to census data 64,184 people in my district are eligible to become naturalized citizens.

I am alarmed at the devastating effect the proposed 83 percent increase in the naturalization fee would have on our community. Under this proposal, the fee to file an application for a Certificate of Citizenship for the N-600 would increase \$530 from its current cost of \$640 to a costly \$1,170 and DACA application renewal fees would also increase from \$495 to \$765. In addition, it would eliminate fee waivers for most forms of citizenship applications, despite the fact that one third of applicants seek fee waivers. The proposal also attacks basic humanitarian rights, as those seeking to apply for asylum would be forced to pay a fee of \$50. These proposed fee hikes will

have devastating effects on our immigrant communities, especially those who come from low-income households and struggle to make ends meet.

The Administration's proposed actions will do direct harm to immigrant communities and are only the latest in a record of harmful and discriminatory immigration policies. This is a blatant attack on our immigrant community and penalizes those who come from low-income households. Charging ever-higher fees for naturalization means limiting our potential by preventing many hundreds of thousands of lawful permanent residents (LPRs) from applying for citizenship. Research has demonstrated that past naturalization fee increases have been a significant barrier to eligible LPRs, and as a result, the number of immigrants eligible to naturalize has grown to nearly 9 million. More than half (54 percent) of those eligible are Latino. Among the population estimated least likely to naturalize – in other words facing the greatest barriers, such as cost – fully 71 percent are Latino. Naturalization significantly enhances the ability of these lower-income and working-class Latinos to make valuable contributions to our nation, and these are the LPRs who would be definitively “priced out” by the USCIS proposal.

Naturalization is important and beneficial to all Americans and to New York State in particular. When legal permanent resident immigrants are afforded the opportunity to become citizens, they become more able to contribute to their communities and society as a whole. They are afforded greater economic stability through expanded professional opportunities that bring the potential to elevate their income. Policies that discourage qualified lawful permanent residents (LPRs) from seeking American citizenship are counterproductive and harmful. Naturalized citizens' commitment to defending and supporting our nation demonstrates their deep patriotism, and when they become full Americans, their civic participation makes our democracy more vital. The process of naturalization is life changing and it is in the public's best interest to ensure the naturalization process is kept financially accessible for the many hundreds of thousands of qualified legal permanent residents. Naturalization also helps grow our economy and results in higher tax contributions. New Americans earn more, are more likely to pursue higher education, and have greater home ownership rates than noncitizens. Congress has also recognized that rising naturalization fees hurts our national interests, and has repeatedly instructed USCIS to maintain the affordability of naturalization. Thus, proposing to increase naturalization fees and eliminating fee waiver options are not only unnecessary and unjustified, but also violate Congressional intent.

Importantly, USCIS must withdraw its proposal to annually transfer more than \$200 million in fees paid by applicants and petitioners to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Federal law does not authorize the expenditure of immigration services fees for ICE's work; accordingly, Congress has repeatedly and pointedly refused to approve proposed transfers from USCIS's Immigration Examinations Fee Account to ICE.

We must continue to fight for the rights of our immigrant communities and ensure those who are eligible to apply for citizenship be given fair and financially accessible ways to do so. In all, the Trump Administration's proposed actions will do direct and needless harm to immigrant communities and are only the latest in a record of harmful and discriminatory immigration policies.

In view of the benefits of naturalization to all Americans, our enduring and bipartisan national policy of promoting U.S. citizenship, and the many preferable alternative means of sustaining agency operations, it would be harmful and counterproductive for USCIS to move forward with

its naturalization fee proposal. I strongly oppose these proposed changes and urge USCIS to rescind the proposed naturalization fee increase and ensure the availability of fee waivers.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Zellnor Y. Myrie". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "Z" and a stylized "M" at the end.

Zellnor Y. Myrie
NYS State Senator
20th Senatorial District