



**Homeland
Security**

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CIS OMBUDSMAN TO THE DIRECTOR, USCIS

To: Dr. Emilio T. Gonzalez, Director, USCIS
Cc: Michael Jackson, Deputy Secretary

From: Prakash Khatri, CIS Ombudsman

Date: June 9, 2006

Re: A recommendation to immediately implement an online change-of-address procedure to supplement the current Form AR-11 process

I. RECOMMENDATION

The CIS Ombudsman recommends that USCIS proceed immediately with plans to supplement current change-of-address (Form AR-11) procedures with an online process. Such action will improve customer satisfaction and confidence with the process while improving USCIS efficiency and enhancing data accuracy.

II. BACKGROUND

Section 265 of the Immigration and Nationality Act as amended (INA) requires all aliens to report any change of address within 10 days of occurrence to USCIS. Currently, USCIS requires customers to utilize Form AR-11, Alien's Change of Address Card, for this action. The completed AR-11 is to be mailed by the alien to a dedicated USCIS facility in London, Kentucky.

The USCIS website instructions for Form AR-11 state that the Form's purpose is "[t]o report the change of address of an alien in the United States."¹ The form itself indicates that "[t]his card is to be used by all aliens to report change of address within 10 days of such change." It further states that the information provided by the alien will be used for "statistical and record purposes."² Many USCIS customers presume that by filing Form AR-11, they are not only complying with the requirements of INA § 265, but also are communicating a request to update their address in records retained by USCIS. These customers therefore file Form AR-11 as instructed but take no additional action to update their address in records retained by USCIS.

¹ [www.USCIS.gov](http://uscis.gov/graphics/formsfee/forms/ar-11.htm), Form AR-11, Change of Address, <<http://uscis.gov/graphics/formsfee/forms/ar-11.htm>>.

² *Id.*

However, USCIS currently does not use Form AR-11 to update customer addresses in its immigration benefits databases. Instead, USCIS uses the AR-11 as the method for customers to meet the legal requirements of INA § 265 and to update records pertaining to the I-94 Arrival/Departure Record. Form AR-11 has in the past been utilized primarily by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) for enforcement purposes. Information contained on Form AR-11 is manually entered by USCIS staff into the Non-Immigrant Information System (NIIS), an increasingly obsolete legacy database. NIIS lacks interconnectivity with existing USCIS immigration benefits databases such as the Computer Linked Application Information Management System (CLAIMS) versions 3 and 4, the Refugee and Asylum Processing System (RAPS), and the Central Index System (CIS). As a result, updated address information does not upload from NIIS into these databases. USCIS has no procedures for entering information from Form AR-11 into these databases, nor does it forward Form AR-11 or the information reported therein to other field offices. Consequently, USCIS personnel at offices where customer applications or petitions are pending do not become aware of address changes through Form AR-11 processing.

For customers to ensure that USCIS is aware of address changes, they generally must notify individual USCIS offices separately. While some customers may update their address in USCIS records by calling the national customer service number, many still must give written notification of a change of address to offices at which they have a pending application or petition. However, because USCIS has established a system in which many applications and petitions are filed in one office but adjudicated in another, customers sometimes find it difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain which office or offices they should notify. Furthermore, no language on Form AR-11 or in the accompanying USCIS website instructions informs customers of the need to provide such separate notification. This information is found, however, on other pages of the USCIS website.

The Ombudsman has expressed various concerns over the AR-11 process to USCIS. USCIS has indicated that it is developing a simple online change-of-address procedure to replace the current Form AR-11 process. At a meeting held on January 4, 2006, then Acting Deputy Director Robert Divine discussed a plan to generate a new electronic change-of-address "form" accessed through the Case Status Service page of the USCIS website to replace Form AR-11. This new form will not be a form like the AR-11 that customers print and mail to USCIS. Rather, customers will merely populate the fields of an internet window with information similar to the information requested on Form AR-11. Customers then will be asked if they have pending cases with USCIS and to enter the receipt numbers for all the applications/petitions pending. This information will allow USCIS to automatically send the new address to all relevant offices. It was indicated at the meeting that this new procedure would be implemented within two months. However, as of the date of this recommendation, no such procedure is in place.

III. JUSTIFICATION

Increasingly accustomed to integrated electronic records systems that are becoming standard in both the private and public sector, USCIS customers reasonably conclude that filing Form AR-11 as instructed is sufficient to notify all USCIS offices of address changes. Failure by USCIS to update all its records using Form AR-11, or to properly notify customers of the limitations of current Form AR-11 processing, has created numerous problems for both USCIS and its customers. It has led to many customer complaints and contributed to the large volume of undeliverable mail, requests for replacement documents, requests to reopen or reconsider cases, missed appointments, and so on. From the customer perspective, it unnecessarily impedes the timely receipt of benefits for which customers are eligible. Placing the burden on customers to ascertain to whom they must give separate notification of address changes, particularly when customers are increasingly unable to determine where their applications or petitions are within the USCIS system, is unreasonable. It is more consistent with the law enforcement focus of the legacy INS than the customer service focus of USCIS.

Not only have customers failed to receive documents such as filing receipts, approval notices and benefits cards, some have also failed to receive time-sensitive documents such as interview notices and requests for further evidence. Consequently, some USCIS customers have been denied benefits for which they were eligible. These customers face the burden of convincing USCIS to reopen or reconsider their cases, which they must do without the benefit of documentary evidence that USCIS received and processed their AR-11 change-of-address request. Ironically, USCIS may expend more resources in resolving these problems than it would in updating its records using Form AR-11.

The Ombudsman commends USCIS for recognizing the seriousness of this issue and moving towards an immediate solution. Although the procedure envisioned by USCIS might not resolve every problem customers experience in attempting to notify USCIS of a change of address, it is a step in the right direction. Consequently, the Ombudsman recommends that this procedure be implemented as soon as possible.

IV. BENEFITS

Customer Service:

Customer service would improve as customers would: 1) be able to change their addresses with USCIS in a simple manner consistent with their expectations; 2) have more confidence that USCIS has received and processed their request to update address information in USCIS records; 3) receive benefits for which they are eligible without unnecessary delay or other complications; and 4) receive all correspondence sent them by USCIS, eliminating the many instances in which customers are denied benefits merely for failure to appear or submit required documentation to USCIS. Such customers would be relieved of the burden of requesting that USCIS reopen or reconsider their cases.

USCIS Efficiency:

USCIS efficiency would improve as USCIS would: 1) have more accurate information concerning customer addresses, allowing it to more effectively communicate with its customers; 2) have less undeliverable mail, and receive fewer customer complaints, allowing it to reallocate resources currently devoted to resolving these issues; 3) be required to issue fewer replacement documents to its customers; and 4) receive fewer requests to reconsider or reopen denials of petitions based solely on the failure of customers to receive correspondence from USCIS. Fewer USCIS customers would miss interviews and other appointments, allowing USCIS offices to more efficiently manage their workloads.

National Security:

This recommendation poses no risks to national security and actually enhances the integrity of USCIS databases by ensuring that USCIS generally has correct information regarding the whereabouts of non-citizens currently receiving or applying for immigration benefits.