

# **Report to the Legislature**

## **Naturalization Services**

As required by 3ESSB 5034, Section 207 (4)

December 2013

Economic Services Administration  
Community Services Division  
Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance  
P.O. Box 45857  
Olympia, WA 98504-5857  
Phone: (360) 725-4636  
Fax: (360) 725-4879



**Table of Contents**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ..... 3**

**BACKGROUND ..... 8**

**NATURALIZATION SERVICES ..... 9**

**PROGRAM OUTCOMES ..... 12**

**BARRIERS TO NATURALIZATION ..... 14**

**PROGRAM FUNDING ..... 15**

**PROGRAM DISBURSEMENTS ..... 16**

**PROGRAM CASELOAD ..... 17**

**Exhibits**

**EXHIBIT A ..... 19**

**EXHIBIT B ..... 21**

**EXHIBIT C ..... 22**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Section 207 (4), 3ESSB 5034 requires the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS or the Department) to report to the Legislature on all sources of available funding for naturalization services during the current fiscal year, amounts expended to-date by service type and funding source, number of participants served, and program outcome data.

### ***Program Overview***

Naturalization is the process by which U.S. citizenship is conferred upon a legal immigrant after he or she fulfills the requirements established under the Immigration and Nationality Act. Generally, a legal immigrant must learn basic U.S. history and civics, and pass a written or oral exam given in English by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) to become a naturalized citizen.

DSHS coordinates naturalization services by contracting statewide with approximately 16 community-based organizations (CBOs) to provide citizenship services to eligible immigrants. Some service providers hold multiple naturalization contracts because they provide services at different locations statewide. Examples of these CBOs include the Korean Women's Association, which provides services in Pierce and Clark counties, and World Relief, which provides services in King, Spokane and Benton counties.

The major components of naturalization services include screening each potential applicant to determine if he or she should apply for citizenship, assistance in completing and filing applications, preparing fee waiver requests, assistance in obtaining a medical disability exception completed and signed by a physician, citizenship preparation training, interview preparation and assistance during the interview.

### ***Program Costs***

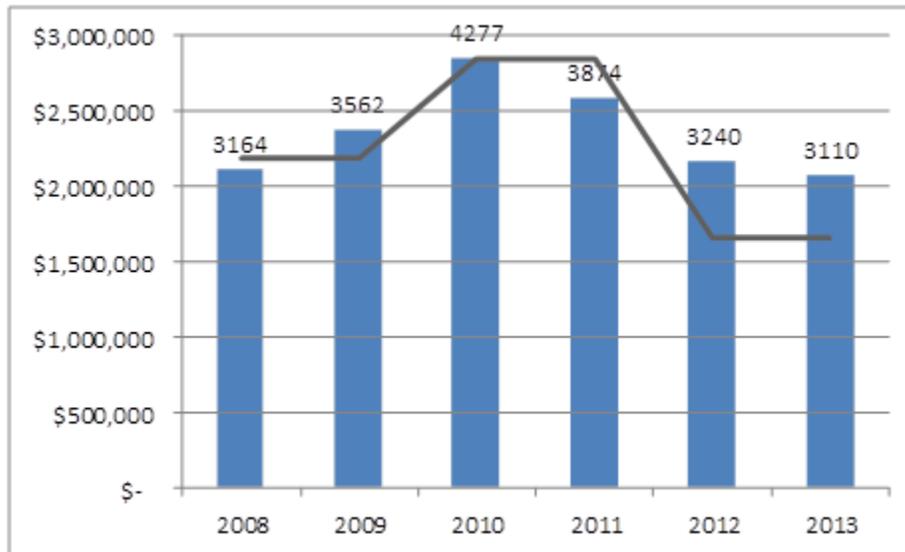
Naturalization services funded by the Department are provided solely with general state funds. In SFY 2013 (July 1, 2012 – June 30, 2013), the Legislature appropriated just over \$1.6 million GF-State for naturalization services.

In SFY 2013, the Naturalization Services program expended approximately \$1.6 million.

### ***Program Caseloads***

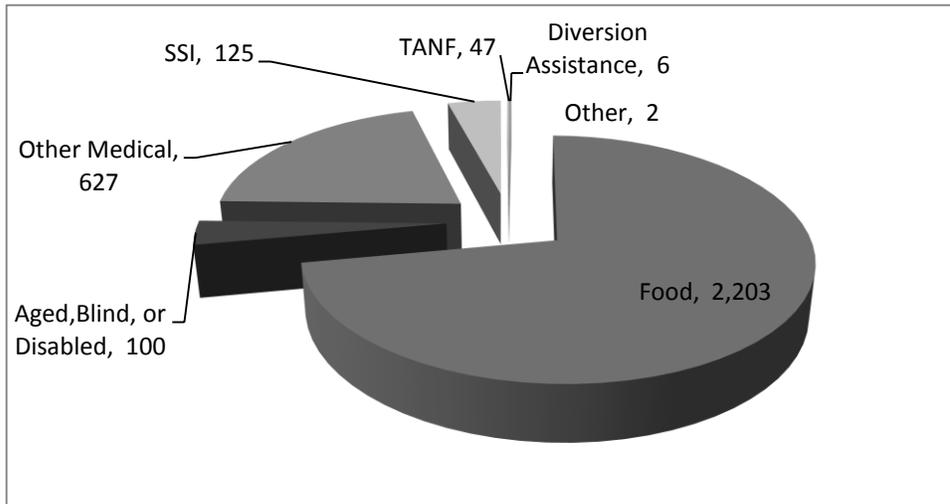
The number of participants served has varied over the last six years and fluctuated with the amount of funding available.

### Number of Unduplicated Participants Served and Annual Budget SFY 2008-2013



State law, RCW 74.08A.130 (**Exhibit B**) requires DSHS to facilitate naturalization applications for legal immigrants who receive public assistance. Clients who enroll in the Naturalization Services program while on public assistance can continue to receive services when their public assistance benefits end.

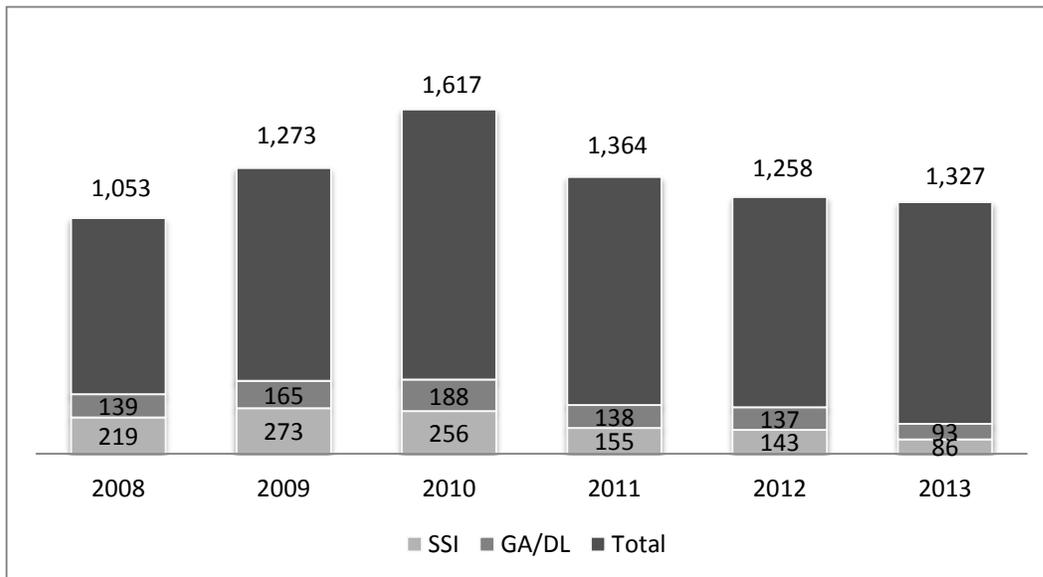
The chart below shows unduplicated clients served by the Naturalization Services program by public assistance program type in SFY 2013.



### Program Outcomes

Naturalization outcome and expenditure data is captured on a state fiscal year basis. Although the main outcome for this program is completed naturalizations, given the challenges and complexities of this process for many of the clients, the program tracks specific activities associated with the citizenship process as pay points and outcomes for billings.

### Total Number of Naturalized Participants, SFY 2008-2013



Over time General Assistance Unemployed (GAU), changed to Disability Lifeline (DL), and is currently titled Aged, Blind, or Disabled (ABD)

Although it may take years for some clients to become naturalized, providers continue to report significant levels of completion rates for clients enrolled in these services.

Providers often expend their funding within six months of the contract year, and some providers have indicated a need for additional funding to address unmet need.<sup>1</sup> In the upcoming year, the Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance plans to work in partnership with the provider community to assess service demand and the need for additional funding for Naturalization Services.

This report will include expenditure and caseload information for SFY 2008 through SFY 2013. The SFY 2013 data is displayed separately because it is the most recent complete fiscal year prior to this report.

### SFY 2013 Outcomes

Service	Number of Participants Served <sup>2</sup>
Intake Screening	1,783
Outreach Enrollment	163
Assistance with USCIS N-400 Application	1,540
Fee Waiver Request	1,548
Disability Exception - USCIS N648 Form	251
Citizenship Training Hours	27,737 Hours
Naturalization Completion Follow-up	1,327
Outreach Naturalization Completion	179
Interview Preparation	692
Interview Assistance	9

<sup>1</sup> Providers annual summary report-2013

<sup>2</sup> A program participant may receive multiple services.

**THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK**

# SFY 2013 REPORT ON NATURALIZATION SERVICES

## BACKGROUND

Washington State has a large and dynamic immigrant community. According to the 2012 US Census estimate, 17.8% of the families in Washington speak a language other than English<sup>3</sup>. In King County, the state's most populous county, 24.8% of the families residing in the county speak a language other than English at home<sup>4</sup>. These numbers reflect a 2% increase over the 2010 US Census numbers.

Washington State resettles a significant number of refugees which contributes to the ethnic diversity in our communities. According to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), in federal fiscal year 2012 (October 2011 through September 2012), Washington State ranked ninth in the nation in resettling new refugees. Only Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania and Texas resettled more refugees than Washington<sup>5</sup>.

Naturalization is often viewed as the hallmark of successful integration. Immigrants who naturalize receive the same rights as other citizens – including the right to vote and the ability to participate in civic engagement. Under current federal law, dependent children automatically become citizens if at least one parent naturalizes. Other benefits include: full protection of the U.S. Constitution, freedom to travel abroad, and eligibility for federal benefits such as Social Security benefits and Medicare.

Legal immigrants who fulfill requirements established under the Immigration and Nationality Act may become naturalized U.S. citizens. General requirements for naturalization include:

- A period of continuous residence and physical presence in the U.S.
- An ability to read, write and speak English
- A knowledge and understanding of U.S. history and government
- Good moral character
- Attachment to the principles of the U.S. Constitution
- Favorable disposition toward the U.S.

---

<sup>3</sup> US Census Bureau, Quick Facts: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/53000.html>

<sup>4</sup> US Census Bureau, Quick Facts: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/53/53033.html>

<sup>5</sup> DHS, Refugee and Asylees: 2011: [http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/ois\\_rfa\\_fr\\_2011.pdf](http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/ois_rfa_fr_2011.pdf)

**Exhibit A** provides basic information on the naturalization process and requirements.

Most legal immigrants, including refugees, must reside in the U.S. for five years before they are eligible to become citizens. There are some exceptions: immigrants who obtained permanent residency through marriage to a U.S. citizen can apply after residing in the U.S. for three years, and applicants who served in the U.S. armed forces during war may obtain citizenship without first becoming a permanent resident if they were in the U.S. upon enlistment into the U.S. military.

State law, RCW 74.08A.130 (**Exhibit B**), requires DSHS to facilitate naturalization applications for legal immigrants who receive public assistance. DSHS contracts with public and private resources statewide to ensure immigrants are referred to or otherwise offered citizenship training classes, obtain appropriate test exemptions and other exemptions in the naturalization process as permitted under federal law, and receive other assistance needed to complete the naturalization process.

Refugees receiving SSI and elderly (age 65 or older) , blind, or disabled refugees who received state-funded Aged, Blind or Disabled (ABD) or Medical Care Services (MCS) benefits are priorities for the Naturalization Program and are designated as “Outreach” clients. This is because refugees are only eligible for SSI for 7 years unless they naturalize. If they lose SSI because of the time limit, they become eligible for the ABD program. Naturalizing these individuals will allow SSI recipients to keep or regain their benefits.

## **NATURALIZATION SERVICES**

The Department provides naturalization facilitation services through contracts with approximately 16 community based organizations (CBO) (**Exhibit C**). Some service providers hold multiple naturalization contracts because they provide services at different locations statewide.

All service providers have ties to ethnic communities and provide bilingual services in culturally appropriate ways to immigrants seeking citizenship services. Many CBOs hire and train immigrants and former refugees from the same or similar ethnic or geographic background to serve new arrival groups. Citizenship classes are held in convenient locations such as at the CBO, community colleges, neighborhood community centers, church facilities, and public housing multi-purpose rooms. Class times and locations, teaching techniques, and transportation assistance are tailored to the needs of the participants.

Attention is given to address special needs in the target population. For example, elderly immigrants may suffer from age related memory loss, lack of

concentration and may have difficulty learning a new language. They often require more class time to practice and study before they can successfully pass the naturalization test. Contractors can also assist individuals who are currently receiving ABD or SSI to waive English Language proficiency requirements based on age and length of LPR (legal permanent resident) status requirements for naturalization. Finally, some contractors are able to provide tutoring for participants who are homebound.

The Department leverages existing community resources when possible to maximize access to naturalization services. For example, DSHS contracts with the City of Seattle for naturalization services in King County. This partnership allows the state to take advantage of services the City already provides through its New Citizens Program (NCP), such as legal assistance and consultation from immigration attorneys, training to citizenship service providers on subjects such as new USCIS forms and policies where participation is open to any state funded provider in the state, and training for citizenship class teachers.

### ***A. Stakeholder Engagement***

Quarterly provider meetings are held throughout the program year, for staff and providers to discuss outreach to clients, program successes and challenges, billing processes and specific contracting topics, as well as structure for upcoming contract years. A smaller representative “focus” group meets regularly to identify specific issues and develop recommendations that are presented to the full provider group.

Outcomes from these meetings include:

- Identifying a gap in assistance to clients and adding a service and pay point for interview assistance.
- Developing a best practice for citizenship training hours and capping services at 400 hours per client
- Discussing and implementing strategies focused on outreach to clients
- Considering and analyzing billing and contract structures

### ***B. Services Provided***

During SFY 2013, providers entered into a performance-based contract that was structured on completion outcomes. Contractors earned 95% of their contract amount by billing for specific services and earned the remaining 5% by achieving a completion goal. This contracting model meets the performance based outcome criteria for contracting required by the Governor’s Executive Order 10-02, Performance Based Contracting.

Naturalization services provided through Department contracts include:

- Intake screening to determine suitability for naturalization and make referrals as necessary to an attorney or a Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA)

accredited person to address legal and good moral character<sup>6</sup> issues associated with an application for naturalization.

- Assistance with completion and submittal of the USCIS Application for Naturalization form (form N-400). The form is lengthy and difficult for many participants to complete.
- Assistance in obtaining a fee waiver (Form I-912) to USCIS.
- Citizenship preparation training and instruction including classes in American History and civics and USCIS interview preparation.
- English language training needed for the citizenship test.
- Assistance with completion and submittal of the USCIS Medical Certification for Disability Exception (form N-648).
- Assistance in obtaining other test exemptions when appropriate.
- Interview preparation which includes practice in answering USCIS interview questions, information from the application and diction.
- Interview assistance for participants to apply for special accommodations at the interview.
- Referrals to legal assistance or representation, such as Appeals if necessary. In most cases, issues can now be addressed in-house.

### ***C. Test Exemptions and Accommodations***

CBO staff assists applicants to apply for test exemptions and accommodations to ensure that they have the best support to pass the naturalization test successfully. The process to obtain exemptions and accommodations is often complex and lengthy thus assistance from trained CBOs is vital to the successful completion of the naturalization process.

Common exemptions include:

- **English and Civics Examination**  
There are two general exemptions: 50/20 (50 years of age and residing in the U.S. for at least 20 years) and 55/15 (55 years of age and residing in the U.S. for at least 15 years). Meeting either criterion means the applicant can waive the requirement to read and write a sentence correctly in English during the naturalization examination. The applicant still needs to take the American

---

<sup>6</sup> Some items USCIS will consider for good moral character include: criminal record, lying to gain immigration benefits, and failing to pay court-ordered child support.

civics exam in English unless further waiver is given to take the same exam in the applicant's native language. The applicant is responsible to bring an interpreter to the interview if the civics exam is given in a language other than English.

- **Medical Disability**  
It waives the English and civics examination for qualified applicants. Form N-648 is completed by a licensed medical or osteopathic doctor, or licensed clinical psychologist to verify the applicant's disability due to a physical or developmental disability or mental impairment that has lasted or is expected to last 12 months or more. Providers have reported an increase in denials from the USCIS and have been meeting to strategize on appropriate strategies to address this concern.

Common accommodations include:

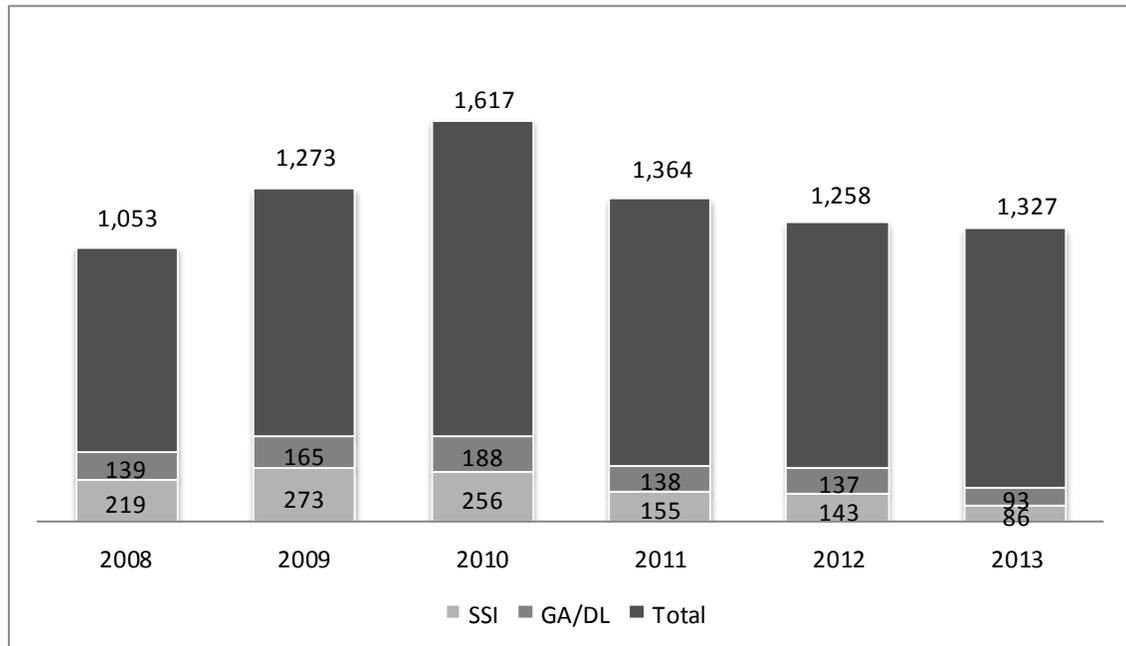
- **Disability**  
USCIS has an obligation under federal law and policy to provide accommodations for physical and mental impairments that make it difficult for applicants to complete the naturalization process, including the examination.
- **Age 65 and Older**  
In some cases, applicants who are 65 years of age and older and have resided in the U.S. for 20 years or more (does not require continuous presence) may be given a shortened version of the naturalization civics examination in the applicant's native language. This waiver does not require the applicant to be disabled.

## **PROGRAM OUTCOMES**

The Naturalization Facilitation program began in April 1997 and nearly 14,020 program participants successfully completed the naturalization process as of SFY 2013. The actual number of naturalized individuals is likely much higher than captured here because participants do not always report their naturalization to service providers. Failure to report a change in status may be due to a number of factors such as multiple attempts before a successful naturalization, relocation during the process, and naturalizing on their own after receiving services through a contractor.

Naturalization outcome and expenditure data is captured on a state fiscal year basis. Although the main outcome for this program is completed naturalizations, given the challenges and complexities of this process for many of the clients, the program tracks specific activities associated with the citizenship process as pay points and outcomes for billings.

## Total Number of Naturalized Participants, SFY 2008-2013



Over time General Assistance Unemployed (GAU), changed to Disability Lifeline (DL), and is currently titled Aged, Blind, or Disabled (ABD)

Although it may take years for some clients to become naturalized, providers continue to report significant levels of completion rates for clients enrolled in these services.

Providers often expend their funding within six months of the contract year, and some providers have indicated a need for additional funding to address unmet need.<sup>7</sup> In the upcoming year, the Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance plans to work in partnership with the provider community to assess service demand and the need for additional funding for Naturalization Services.

### SFY 2013 Outcomes

Service	Number of Participants Served <sup>8</sup>
Intake Screening	1,783
Outreach Enrollment	163
Assistance with USCIS N-400 Application	1,540

<sup>7</sup> Providers annual summary report-2013

<sup>8</sup> A program participant may receive multiple services.

Service	Number of Participants Served <sup>8</sup>
Fee Waiver Request	1,548
Disability Exception - USCIS N648 Form	251
Citizenship Training Hours	27,737
Naturalization Completion Follow-up	1,327
Outreach Naturalization Completion	179
Interview Preparation	692
Interview Assistance	9

## BARRIERS TO NATURALIZATION

The current naturalization examination format has been in place since October 1, 2008. It was changed from the previous form to move away from civics trivia to emphasize the basic concepts of U.S. government structure and American history and geography. To pass the test, applicants must have a more detailed understanding of U.S. history and civics. For example, the examination will test the applicant's knowledge of the Federalist Papers and how they influenced ratification of the U.S. Constitution. USCIS hoped that the new test will encourage attachment to the principles of citizenship<sup>9</sup>.

The Department and service contractors are working to mitigate barriers to the naturalization process by helping participants overcome anxieties and barriers to the citizenship process, including:

- Age-related memory problems and their impact on learning civics and history
- Inability to speak English under the pressure of the citizenship interview
- Citizenship classes tailored for “everyone” regardless of English capabilities
- Difficulty in obtaining test exemptions and/ or accommodations
- High costs related to the naturalization process: \$595 application fee and \$85 for the mandatory fingerprint fee

<sup>9</sup> Alphonso Aguilar, Chief of the Office of Citizenship, Press Conference on New Naturalization Test, September 27, 2007, [http://www.uscis.gov/files/pressrelease/natzrndtbl\\_72sep07.pdf](http://www.uscis.gov/files/pressrelease/natzrndtbl_72sep07.pdf)

The high cost of application fees can be a barrier to individuals applying for citizenship. However, USCIS will waive this fee for low-income applicants such as those on public assistance. Service providers are required by contract to assist participants submit a fee waiver request and help them gather the documentation they need to support their request. In SFY 2013, contracted providers helped participants submit approximately 1,548 fee waiver requests to USCIS. While there is great benefit in seeking waivers, filing waiver requests is a significant workload for both the service provider and the applicant. Submitting a fee waiver request will generally increase the processing time by about two months.

Another barrier in the naturalization process is related to Medical Disability waivers. In the past 6 months, providers have been experiencing an increased level of disability waiver denials by USCIS. A disability waiver allows disabled clients, particularly those with mental health issues, to either take a simplified citizenship test or have the test waived. The “spike” in denials is not unique to our state and has been recognized by the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement, who organized a national discussion on this topic. The concern is that USCIS requires medical documentation to support the disability request and USCIS agents, who are not medically trained, are overriding the medical evidence based on their own perception of the client’s disability. Providers have asked the State to help facilitate and articulate concerns from a statewide perspective to USCIS.

## PROGRAM FUNDING

Naturalization services have been provided solely through state funds. Although some federal funds have been used in the past for naturalization, the current priority has been to allocate these resources for employment services for refugees.

In SFY 2013, \$1,657,000 was allocated for naturalization. The same amount has been allocated for the upcoming SFY 2014.

The following chart lists budget information by funding source for SFY 2008-2013:

State Fiscal Year	Federal	State	Total
2008	-0-	\$2,186,000.00	\$2,186,000.00
2009	\$12,000.00	\$2,186,000.00	\$2,198,000.00
2010	-0-	\$2,842,000.00	\$2,842,000.00
2011	-0-	\$2,842,000.00	\$2,842,000.00

2012	-0-	\$1,657,000.00	\$1,657,000.00
2013	-0-	\$1,657,000.00	\$1,657,000.00

## PROGRAM DISBURSEMENTS

In SFY 2013, the Legislature appropriated just over \$1.6 million for naturalization services.

In SFY 2013, the Naturalization Program expended just over \$1.6 million.

### Program Expenditures, SFY 2013 (July 1, 2012 - June 30, 2013)

Service	Expenditures
Intake Screening	\$187,352.00
Outreach Enrollment Bonus	\$45,200.00
Assistance with USCIS N-400 Application	\$237,750.00
Fee Waiver Request	\$237,900.00
Disability Exception - USCIS N648 Form	\$63,928.00
Citizenship Training	\$264,845.00
Naturalization Completion Follow-up	\$453,953.00
Outreach Naturalization Completion	\$35,200.00
Interview Preparation	\$66,110.00
Appeals	\$1,000.00
Outcome Goals achievement	\$61,350.00
Other fees and assistance	\$1,685.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,656,273.00</b>

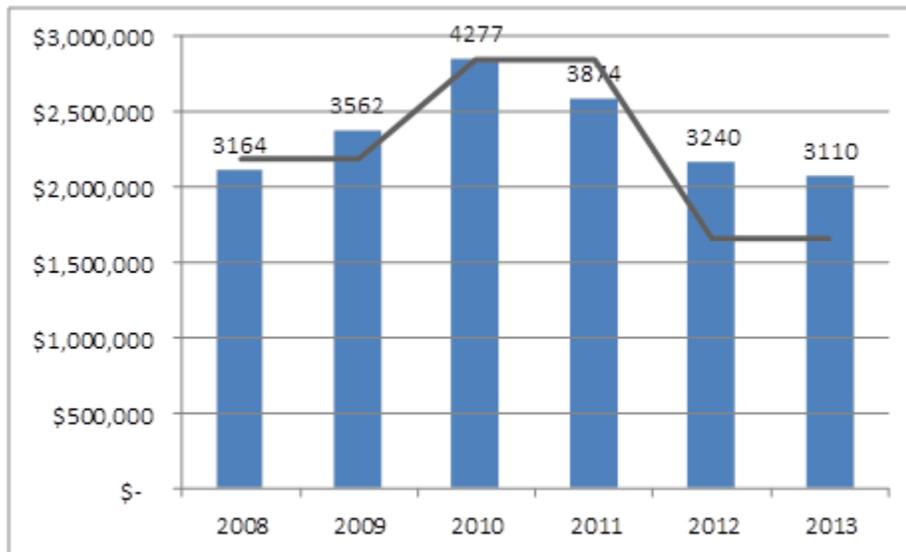
The following chart shows total program disbursement for SFY 2008-2013:

State Fiscal Year	Total Budget	Total Distribution	Balance
2008	\$2,186,000.00	\$1,796,851.00	\$389,149.00
2009	\$2,198,000.00	\$2,179,294.00	\$18,706.00
2010	\$2,842,000.00	\$2,810,886.00	\$31,113.75
2011	\$2,842,000.00	\$1,951,547.48	\$890,652.52 <sup>10</sup>
2012	\$1,657,000.00	\$1,631,619.00	\$25,381.00
2013	\$1,657,000.00	\$1,656,273.00	\$727.00

### PROGRAM CASELOADS

The number of participants served has varied over the last six years and fluctuated with the amount of funding available.

**Number of Unduplicated Participants Served and Annual Budget SFY 2008-2013**



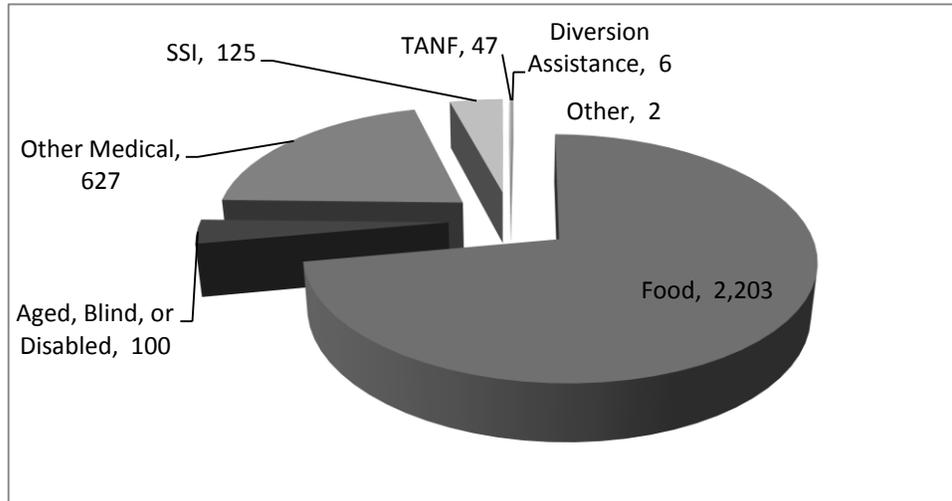
The chart above shows that approximately \$2.8 million was allocated in SFY 2011 for services but the Naturalization Services Program was terminated on November 30, 2010 (only five months into the fiscal year) as a cost saving measure during a period of economic downturn. Of the approximately \$2.8

<sup>10</sup> This lower level of spending in the program was part of DSHS' budget reduction requirements.

million allocated to Naturalization, only \$1.9 million was expended before program termination.

State law, RCW 74.08A.130 (**Exhibit B**) requires DSHS to facilitate naturalization applications for legal immigrants who receive public assistance. Clients who enroll into the Naturalization Services program while on public assistance can continue to receive services even if their public assistance benefits end.

This chart shows unduplicated clients served by the Naturalization Services program by public assistance program type in SFY 2013



# EXHIBIT A

## BASIC INFORMATION ON BECOMING A U.S. CITIZEN

### Who is eligible?

Legal permanent residents (LPR) who have resided in the U.S. for five years (three years if married to a US citizen). LPR status is indicated on the applicant's USCIS-I-551 Permanent Resident Card (also known as a "green card").

### Requirements to apply for citizenship - Applicant must:

- Have been present in the U.S. for at least half of the 5 years (three years if married to a U.S. citizen);
- Be able to pass a test on speaking, understanding, reading and writing basic English;
- Be able to pass a United States history and government test;
- Have good moral character;
- Understand and accept the oath of allegiance to the United States; and
- Not have a citizenship-related legal problem.

### Exceptions in the testing requirements

For applicants that meet certain age and time in the U.S. criteria, the USCIS makes exceptions to the testing procedures. This may include allowing the applicant to bring an interpreter for the English test, or asking the applicant 10 history and U.S. government questions instead of 20. For applicants who meet the USCIS criteria for disability, both tests are waived.

### What is the process?

If the applicant meets all the eligibility requirements, he or she may file a USCIS Application for Naturalization form with required photos and a money order or check for the application fee (\$595) and fingerprint fee (\$85) to the USCIS. The process takes approximately 4 months from the date of the application to date of interview with USCIS.

### Are there any resources available to help?

There are community based organizations in the state that provide services to eligible applicants including assistance in completing the citizenship application and disability waiver requests, providing applicants with the USCIS fees, or assisting them to request the USCIS to waive the fees for low income families. These agencies also provide citizenship preparation classes.

## **What are the benefits?**

Many SSI clients that have not naturalized or cannot show they have 40 work quarters will lose their SSI benefits when they reach their 7 year time limit. By becoming citizens, they can maintain their benefits and become eligible for a full range of other public benefits. Citizens can apply for more family members to immigrate to the US and often more quickly than lawful permanent residents. Children, who are under 18 and live at home at the time one or both of their parents naturalizes, automatically become U.S. citizens. Citizens can vote, can travel abroad without worrying about re-entry permits, are protected from deportation and can apply for certain government jobs.

## **EXHIBIT B**

### **RCW 74.08A.130**

#### **Immigrants - Naturalization facilitation.**

The department shall make an affirmative effort to identify and proactively contact legal immigrants receiving public assistance to facilitate their applications for naturalization. The department shall obtain a complete list of legal immigrants in Washington who are receiving correspondence regarding their eligibility from the social security administration. The department shall inform immigrants regarding how citizenship may be attained. In order to facilitate the citizenship process, the department shall coordinate and contract, to the extent necessary, with existing public and private resources and shall, within available funds, ensure that those immigrants who qualify to apply for naturalization are referred to or otherwise offered classes. The department shall assist eligible immigrants in obtaining appropriate test exemptions, and other exemptions in the naturalization process, to the extent permitted under federal law.

**EXHIBIT C**  
**SFY 2013 NATURALIZATION CONTRACTS**

<b>CONTRACTORS</b>	<b>AWARD AMOUNT</b>
<b>City of Seattle, Dept. of Human Services</b>	\$ 355,537
<b>East African Community Services</b>	\$ 88,323
<b>International Rescue Committee</b>	\$ 49,161
<b>Korean Women's Association</b>	\$ 51,896 – King County \$ 74,490 – Pierce County
<b>Lutheran Community Services NW</b>	\$ 44,161 – King County \$ 134,151 – Clark County
<b>Multicultural Self Sufficiency Movement</b>	\$ 73,636
<b>Northwest Immigrant Rights Project</b>	\$ 36,000 – Eastern WA \$ 14,270 – Western WA
<b>Ready by Five</b>	\$ 42,500
<b>Refugee Federation Service Center</b>	\$ 118,600
<b>Refugee &amp; Immigrant Services NW</b>	\$ 153,512
<b>Tacoma Community House</b>	\$ 67,438
<b>Ukrainian Community Center</b>	\$ 44,161
<b>World Relief (Seattle)</b>	\$ 119,134
<b>World Relief (Spokane)</b>	\$ 135,000
<b>World Relief (Tri Cities)</b>	\$ 55,030
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 1,657,000</b>