

## REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

### Naturalization Services

Chapter 299, Laws of 2018 (ESSB 6032 Section 207 (4))

January 1, 2019

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Chapter 299, Laws of 2018 (ESSB 6032 Section 207 (4)) requires that the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS or the Department) report to the Legislature annually on all sources of available funding for naturalization services during the current fiscal year, amounts expended to date by service type and funding source, the number of participants served, and program outcome data.

This Naturalization Services report covers state fiscal year (SFY) 2018 (July 1, 2017 – June 30, 2018).

### Program Overview

The Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance (ORIA) is located within DSHS, Economic Services Administration, Community Services Division, and administers \$24 million in federal and state dollars to more than 60 providers, serving over 9,000<sup>1</sup> refugee and immigrant clients in Washington state annually. ORIA services include Refugee Cash Assistance and Refugee Medical Assistance (RCA/RMA), comprehensive case management, self-sufficiency education, immigration assistance, refugee health and mental health services, employment assistance, English as a second language (ESL) services, unaccompanied refugee minor foster care, youth educational activities, elderly services and naturalization services.

Naturalization is the process by which the Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) grants U.S. citizenship to a legal immigrant after he or she fulfills the requirements established by Congress in the Immigration and Nationality Act. To qualify for naturalization, an immigrant must be a legal permanent resident (LPR) for five years<sup>2</sup>, have good moral character, and demonstrate knowledge of U.S. Civics and English by passing a written and oral exam.

Washington state law, RCW 74.08A.130 (**Attachment B**), requires DSHS to make an affirmative effort to identify and proactively contact legal immigrants receiving public assistance to facilitate their applications for naturalization. ORIA administers the Naturalization Services program statewide by contracting with community-based organizations (CBOs),

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<sup>1</sup> Economic Services Administration Program Briefing Book 2017 Annual Unduplicated Clients Served report for Refugee and Immigrant Assistance (RIA) unduplicated clients. This count includes clients served by the following ORIA programs: LEP Pathway, ORIA Basic Food Employment and Training, and Naturalization Services.

<sup>2</sup> USCIS 'time in the U.S.' requirement varies among immigrants. Some may naturalize sooner than five years in the U.S.

nonprofit legal services organizations and refugee resettlement agencies recognized by the Office of Legal Access Programs (OLAP) in the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). In the past, the Board of Immigration Appeals administered this recognition. In addition, ORIA collaborates and contracts with the City of Seattle to leverage state and local funds to expand naturalization services in King county.

Immigrants receiving public assistance are eligible for the Naturalization Services Program if they meet USCIS criteria to apply for U.S. citizenship and will be eligible to naturalize within a year of receiving naturalization services. Clients who enroll into the Naturalization Services program while on public assistance can continue to receive services even if their public assistance benefits end.

The Naturalization Services program provides specialized and culturally appropriate services that help clients become U.S. citizens. These services include intake eligibility screening, application assistance, preparing fee waiver requests, assistance in obtaining medical disability exemption for disabled and elderly clients medically unable to pass the exam, citizenship training and preparation classes, interview preparation and on-site interview assistance, appeals, and follow-up reporting to confirm enrolled clients have naturalized.

### **Outreach Participants**

The Naturalization Service program prioritizes reaching out to people who may be in jeopardy of losing federally funded public benefits if they fail to naturalize, or to those people who could gain access to federal benefits if they became U.S. citizens. Federal law stipulates that people who are refugees or humanitarian immigrants that experience a disability may receive federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits for a maximum of seven years. If after seven years they fail to naturalize, they will lose their federal benefits, and many become eligible to receive state-funded Aged, Blind, and Disabled (ABD) benefits. Other people who are lawful permanent residents may only be eligible to receive federal SSI benefits if they become U.S. citizens. Therefore, providers give precedence to serve the following targeted group of “outreach” participants:

- People with refugee or humanitarian immigration status that arrived in the U.S. on or after August 22, 1996, who are currently receiving federal SSI benefits, and have not naturalized;
- People with refugee or humanitarian immigration status or lawful permanent residents that are currently receiving state-funded ABD benefits; or

- People with refugee and other humanitarian immigration status who are no longer eligible to receive SSI as a result of the seven-year time limit, which is removed once they become U.S. citizens.

## **Program Budget and Expenditures**

For SFY 2018, the Washington state Legislature appropriated \$1,657,000 in general state funds (GF-S) for the Naturalization Services program. ORIA administers the total budget for this program via statewide contracts for the provision of services. See **Attachment C**.

In SFY 2018, the Naturalization Services program has expended \$1,657,000.

## **Program Outcomes**

In SFY 2018, the Naturalization Services program served 2,869 unduplicated clients. Out of those served, 551 (19 percent) identified as outreach participants; and providers reported that 1,069 clients became naturalized U.S. citizens.

## **BACKGROUND**

Washington State has a large and dynamic immigrant community and is among the top refugee receiving states in the nation<sup>3</sup>. According to the 2017 American Community Survey, out of Washington's total 2017 estimated population of 7,405,743, approximately 14.3 percent (1,060,153) are foreign-born, and 47.9 percent of those are naturalized U.S. citizens<sup>4</sup>.

Each year, the Department of Homeland Security, USCIS welcomes approximately 700,000 citizens during naturalization ceremonies across the U.S. and around the world. In FFY 2017, 716,325 people became U.S. citizens, including 14,990 people in Washington state<sup>5</sup>.

Naturalization is 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. Other benefits include full protection of the U.S. Constitution, freedom to travel abroad, and

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<sup>3</sup> Refugee Processing Center: <http://www.wrapsnet.org/admissions-and-arrivals/>

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder:  
[https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community\\_facts.xhtml](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml)

<sup>5</sup> USCIS, Naturalization Data Set: <https://www.uscis.gov/tools/reports-studies/immigration-forms-data/data-set-form-n-400-application-naturalization>

eligibility for federal benefits such as Social Security and Medicare. See **Attachment A** for basic information on becoming a U.S. citizen.

Since its creation in April 1997, ORIA's Naturalization Services program continues to provide specialized and culturally appropriate services to assist eligible immigrants receiving public assistance who are interested in becoming U.S. citizens to apply, prepare and successfully naturalize in Washington state.

In SFY 2018, ORIA provided Naturalization Services through 13 contracts statewide with community-based organizations (CBOs), nonprofit legal services organizations that specialize in immigration, and refugee resettlement agencies recognized by the OLAP in the U.S. DOJ (see **Attachment C**). Some contractors provide services at different locations statewide through multiple contracts.

ORIA leverages existing community resources to maximize access to quality naturalization services. For example, ORIA contracts with the City of Seattle's Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (OIRA) to leverage additional city funding for their New Citizens program, which has 12 providers. Through this partnership, Washington state supports a broader collaborative approach to offering services in King county. The City of Seattle's New Citizens program offers access to training and technical assistance to support any state-funded provider as well as training for citizenship class teachers.

All providers are required to be DOJ recognized organizations with DOJ accredited individuals on staff and/or have access to a licensed immigration attorney. In 2017, to build service capacity, ORIA partnered with the City of Seattle, King county, and OneAmerica to provide a 40-hour basic immigration law training to help

**Success Story:**

Shamsa, a deaf Iraqi refugee, wanted to become a U.S. citizen. Since she can only communicate in Arabic Sign Language, it required unconventional assistance to help her through the naturalization process. It involved an Arabic Sign Language interpreter not fluent in English who assisted World Relief Tri-Cities (WRTC) staff by signing all the application and screening questions that their Arabic language interpreter interpreted for him to sign to her. Shamsa then signed her answers to the Arabic Sign Language interpreter who then interpreted the signing into Arabic which was then interpreted into English for WRTC's staff. As one can imagine, this was a very lengthy process; going through both an eligibility screening and application questions in addition to other questions that Shamsa had about the process and preparation for her interview. Her interview was a success and suffice to say she would probably not be a U.S. citizen today had it not been for the extra help she received through the ORIA's Naturalization program.

World Relief Tri-Cities

organizations and representatives from organizations to become DOJ recognized and accredited.

DSHS Naturalization Services providers have ties to ethnic communities and provide bilingual services in culturally appropriate ways to immigrants seeking naturalization services. Many organizations hire and train immigrants and former refugees from the same or similar ethnic or geographic background to serve refugee and immigrant clients. 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. Providers tailor classes to meet the needs of their participants, creating flexibility in the class times and locations, teaching techniques, and available transportation assistance.

In SFY 2018, ORIA contracted with Northwest Immigrant Rights Project (NWIRP) to provide legal consultation and training to its providers and to assist eligible participants with complex naturalization cases to become naturalized U.S. Citizens.

## **ELIGIBLE POPULATION**

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, for example: 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.

Individuals are eligible to receive DSHS-funded Naturalization Services if they are non-citizen, legal immigrants who:

- Are Washington state residents; and
- Are 18 years old or older; and
- Are recipients of SSI, or other Washington state administered state/federal funded cash, food, medical assistance, or were receiving such benefits at the time the participant began receiving Naturalization Services; and
- Meet the eligibility criteria to apply for U.S. citizenship, including lawful permanent residence status; and

- Are eligible to naturalize or will be eligible to naturalize within one year of receiving Naturalization Services.

Clients who enroll in the Naturalization Services program while on public assistance can continue to receive services even if their public assistance benefits end.

## Outreach Participants

The DSHS Naturalization Services program prioritizes reaching out to people who may be in jeopardy of losing federally funded public benefits if they fail to naturalize or to those people who could gain access to federal benefits if they became U.S. citizens.

People with refugee or other humanitarian immigration status are only eligible to receive SSI for up to seven years unless they naturalize. If they fail to become a U.S. citizen, they will lose their SSI cash benefits (in 2018, a monthly income of \$750 per eligible individual and \$1,125 per eligible couple). Once they lose SSI, they are eligible for the Washington state ABD program, which is a monthly cash benefit of up to \$197 (\$248 for an eligible couple). Naturalization allows SSI recipients to keep or regain their benefits, which is a higher monthly income and does not draw on state funds.

### Success Story:

At age 83, Miroslav had a stroke and he suffered from lack of concentration and an inability to memorize new information. Regardless of this disability, he was determined to become a U.S. citizen, so he started attending citizenship classes. Miroslav needed multiple surgeries for an aneurism, so he decided to apply for naturalization and filed for a Disability Exception (N648). His N648 was rejected a couple times by USCIS for more information even though he was clearly disabled. After his N648 was denied, Refugee Federation Service Center helped Miroslav appeal this decision. His N648 was finally approved by USCIS and Miroslav is now a U.S. citizen. He is now receiving SSI and enjoying all of rights and benefits that come with being a U.S. citizen.

Refugee Federation Service Center

The DSHS Naturalization Services program identifies people with refugee or other humanitarian immigration status who receive federal SSI or state-funded ABD benefits as a target group and designates them as "Outreach" participants.

Outreach participants are:

- People with refugee or humanitarian immigration status who arrived in the U.S. on or after August 22, 1996, who are currently receiving SSI, and have not naturalized;
- People with refugee or humanitarian immigration status or lawful permanent residence (LPR) that are currently receiving ABD; or

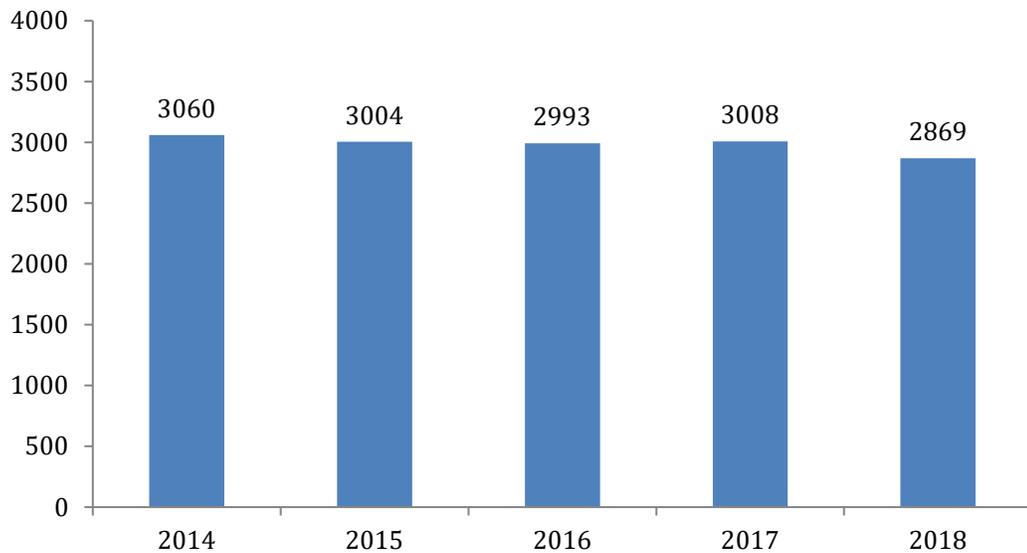
- People with refugee or humanitarian immigration status that are no longer receiving SSI as a result of the seven-year time limit.

## POPULATION SERVED

In SFY 2018, a total of 2,869 participants received naturalization services, of which 1,351 (47 percent) were refugees and 1,518 (53 percent) were non-refugee clients<sup>6</sup>.

The chart below shows the number of Naturalization Services program participants from SFY 2014-2018:

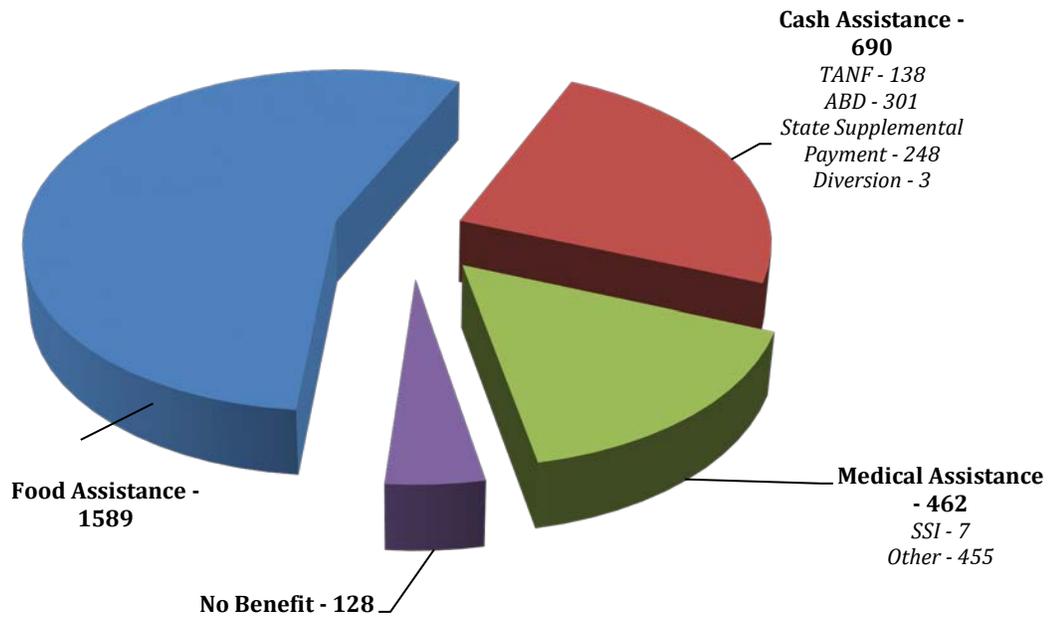
**Total Number of Participants in DSHS Naturalization Services Program  
SFY 2014-2018**



The following chart shows the total number of unduplicated participants in SFY 2018 by their benefit type. If a client is in more than one public assistance program, DSHS uses the unduplicated client count based on program hierarchy: cash, food, and then medical.

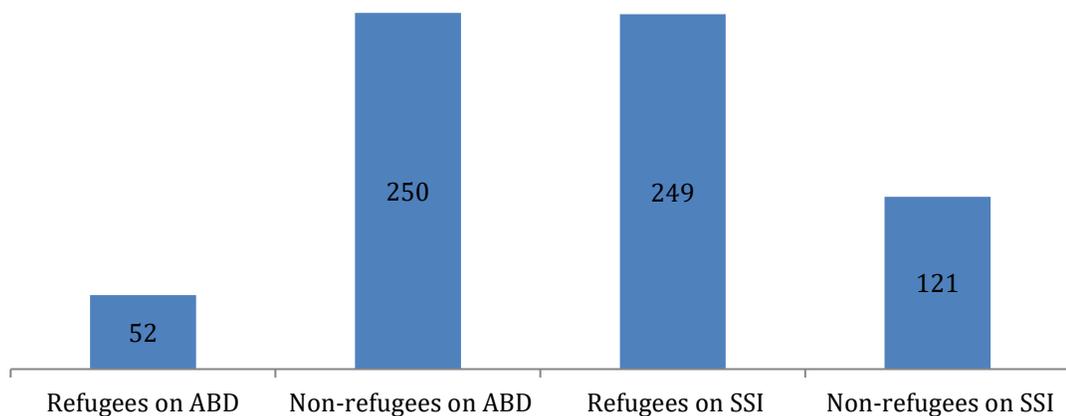
<sup>6</sup> Data Source: RIA, ACES Database Warehouse as of 10/10/2018.

### Number of Unduplicated Participants by Benefit Type in SFY 2018<sup>7</sup>



The following chart shows the total 672 clients on ABD and SSI served in SFY 2018:

### Number of Refugees/Non-Refugees on ABD/SSI in SFY 2018<sup>8</sup>



<sup>7</sup> Data Source: RIA, ACES Database Warehouse as of 10/10/2018. 128 Clients have no benefit. Clients who enroll into the Naturalization Services Program while on public assistance can continue to receive services even if their public assistance benefits end.

<sup>8</sup> Data Source: RIA, ACES Database Warehouse as of 10/10/2018.

In SFY 2018, 551 participants met the criteria that prioritize them for outreach and recruitment into the program. For instance, these are people at risk of losing their federal SSI benefits if they fail to naturalize within seven years after arrival in the United States. They are also people with refugee immigration status who are receiving state-funded ABD cash assistance, when they could be eligible for SSI if they became U.S. citizens.

In addition, there were 121 legal permanent residents (LPRs) receiving SSI but were not considered as outreach participants, because they will not lose their SSI if they fail to naturalize. LPRs are eligible for SSI if they have 40 federal credits of work in the U.S. and the 7-year rule does not apply to them. If LPRs entered the U.S. on or after August 22, 1996, then LPRs may not be eligible for SSI for the first five years as a lawfully admitted permanent resident, even if they have 40 credits of earnings.

## **SERVICES**

In SFY 2018, DSHS contracted with Naturalization Service providers to offer the services listed below.

- Intake Screening – Establishing program and naturalization eligibility by interviewing and completing of the Intake Screening form as provided by ORIA for potential participants.
- Application Assistance – Assistance with completion and submittal of the USCIS Application for Naturalization (Form N-400) and the Request for Fee Waiver (Form I-912) to waive the N-400 and fingerprint fees. These forms are lengthy and difficult for many participants to complete.
- Training and Instruction – Citizenship preparation training and instruction includes classes in American history and civics and USCIS interview questions. English language training needed for the citizenship test may also be provided.
- Disability Waiver – Assistance with completion and submittal of the USCIS Medical Certification for Disability Exception (Form N-648), and assistance obtaining other test exemptions when appropriate.
- Interview Preparation – Includes follow-up with participants and USCIS on the date and time for an interview; arrangement for interpreters, attorneys, and additional documents requested by USCIS; and additional sessions to practice pronunciation and diction.

- Interview Assistance – Assisting participants to apply for special accommodations during the interview process and/or being present on-site with participants during the interview to provide assistance and support.
- Fingerprint Fee – Reimbursement of the fingerprint fee for all participants age 75 years and under who do not meet USCIS criteria for fee waivers and have received a denial of eligibility of their waiver request from USCIS based on ineligibility.
- N-400 Fee – Reimbursement of the USCIS Form N-400 application-processing fee when participant is ineligible for a fee waiver. This requires prior written approval by the DSHS ORIA program manager.
- Appeals – For Immigration Attorney or OLAP accredited representative to assist with Request for a Hearing on a Decision in Naturalization Proceedings (USCIS Form N-336) to request a hearing before an immigration officer regarding the denial of the participant's USCIS N-400 Application.
- Naturalization Completion Follow-Up – Providers track and monitor the progress of the client's N-400 application with USCIS. They contact and follow-up with clients to confirm that they have been interviewed and/or have participated in the oath ceremony. ORIA requires providers to report the successful naturalization of a participant to ensure the quality of the services being provided. Contractors must

**Success Story:**

Client Y lives with schizophrenia and receives psychiatric care while living in supportive housing. She was attacked at her apartment by another resident, but when the police arrived, she was arrested. Her case was dismissed after the court found no culpability on her behalf. She wanted to apply for naturalization, but was worried that this arrest would prejudice her. She has two U.S. citizen children that live with their father. She wanted to become a U.S. citizen so that there was no risk of her being separated from her children in the future. She also worried that she would be unable to pass the history and civics test required for naturalization because her medication often makes her very tired and makes concentrating difficult. After a thorough case analysis, Northwest Immigrant Rights Project represented her on her citizenship case. The officer asked her many questions at the interview about her prior arrests, and also needed information from her doctor regarding her competency to understand the Oath of Allegiance to the U.S. She passed the test, and USCIS finally approved her naturalization case this year. Her fear and anxiety of being one day separated from her children are now gone, and she is happy to have the security that U.S. citizenship provides.

NW Immigrant Rights Project

provide the date of naturalization and one of the following naturalization verifications: copy of USCIS oath ceremony notice, valid US Passport, or naturalization certificate number.

This year, ORIA expanded services through a partnership with the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project (NWIRP) to build service provider capacity and support for complex immigration cases. These services include:

- Technical Assistance – Providing legal consultation to other DSHS Naturalization Services providers to determine the best way to assist participants to become naturalized U.S. Citizens
- Trainings – Developing and providing training and training materials specifically designed to help other DSHS Naturalization Services providers develop an understanding of various naturalization topics and best practices for handling complex naturalization cases.
- Case Analysis – Conducting a comprehensive case analysis to determine whether the participant is eligible for representation for naturalization. A case analysis includes client interview, record request, legal research, criminal analysis, and follow up naturalization services with the participant if case is determined to be representable leading to successful naturalization.

### **Test Exemptions and Accommodations**

Contractor staff assist applicants in applying 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 provider staff 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 civics exam in English unless granted a waiver 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  
A medical disability exemption waives the English and civics examination for qualified applicants. A licensed medical or osteopathic doctor or licensed clinical psychologist completes Form N-648 to verify the applicant's disability due to a physical or developmental disability or mental impairment that has lasted or will last 12 months or longer. DSHS contractors have reported an increase in denials from USCIS and have been meeting to identify 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.

## **Outreach Participants**

Providers prioritize services and pay extra attention to address special needs in the outreach target population. For example, elderly refugees 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 legal permanent resident status requirements for naturalization. Finally, some contractors are able to provide tutoring for homebound outreach participants.

## Naturalization Completion Reporting

The goal of the Naturalization Services program is to assist people in becoming naturalized US citizens. Contractor staff assist clients throughout the naturalization process, from application completion and submission to responding to requests for additional information to being present on-site at USCIS offices during a client's formal interview process. Contracted service providers must monitor and track their caseloads on a regular basis to ensure that clients successfully naturalize. This requires regular follow-up and outreach to the client over a longer period of time after the submission of the application.

Contractors are reimbursed based on payment points for work, from application submission to follow-up services, including reporting of successful naturalization. By reporting the naturalization completions to ORIA, contractors are confirming that they have successfully assisted eligible refugees and immigrants in becoming U.S. Citizens. After naturalization, contractors may also assist clients with their voter registration and notification of naturalization to all necessary agencies, such as the Social Security Administration.

In SFY 2018, USCIS reported that the processing time for the N-400 (citizenship) applications in the Seattle Field Office was approximately 16 - 18 months, which is twice the length of time as in prior years. With the naturalization process lengthening, the number of completions providers have been able to report has declined. ORIA continues to work with providers to evaluate the impact of processing times on the Naturalization Services program.

### Success Story:

Maria applied for naturalization on her 97<sup>th</sup> birthday. She was very determined to become a U.S. citizen before it was too late for her. Despite Maria's belief that she would not bear arms to defend the U.S. due to her past experiences in Nicaragua, where she witnessed firsthand the horrible effects that war can have on people, the officer recommended Maria for Naturalization. Maria is very grateful that she can call herself a U.S. citizen as it was the best birthday present she received.

Lutheran Community Services NW

## PROGRAM FUNDING

The DSHS Naturalization Services program receives all of its support solely through general state funds (GF-S). Since 2012, the Washington State Legislature has annually appropriated \$1,657,000 for services. In the past

year, providers reported an increase in the need for naturalization services, as many people in our communities are eager for the protections and opportunities afforded by naturalizing. To address the need for services, providers leverage state dollars with other funding resources, such as grants from USCIS. Regardless of the varied funding streams, providers report waiting lists for their services.

In SFY 2018, the Naturalization program expended the total amount of \$1,657,000. The following chart shows total program disbursement for SFY 2014-2018:

State Fiscal Year	Total Budget	Total Distribution	Balance
2014	\$1,657,000	\$1,617,793 <sup>9</sup>	\$ 39,207
2015	\$1,657,000	\$1,634,792 <sup>10</sup>	\$ 22,208
2016	\$1,657,000	\$1,649,362	\$ 7,638
2017	\$1,657,000	\$1,646,184	\$ 10,816
2018	\$1,657,000	\$1,657,000	\$ 0

## PROGRAM DISBURSEMENTS

The Naturalization Services program contracts follow a state fiscal year schedule (July 1 to June 30). In SFY 2018, Contractors entered into a performance-based contract structured on naturalization completions. This contracting model meets the performance based outcome criteria for contracting required by the Governor’s Executive Order 10-02, *Performance Based Contracting*. Under this model, contractors may receive up to 80 percent of their contract amount by billing for specific service payment points and may earn the remaining 20 percent by achieving their individually negotiated naturalization completion annual performance outcome goals.

Contractors have a menu of services that they are allowed to bill for and make discretionary determination on how they want to spend their allotted contract amount under the 80/20 percent model. Contractors submit invoices for naturalization services on a monthly basis and submit billings up to 30 days after each month of service. ORIA permits the submission of an additional final invoice after their June submission is allowed to close out

<sup>9</sup> As of October 1, 2014.

<sup>10</sup> As of September 29, 2015, a balance of \$22,208 was unspent.

the program service year. DSHS has 30 days from the date of receipt and approval of each invoice to process and make payment.

The following chart shows SFY 2018 program expenditures by service type:

### Program Expenditures, SFY 2018

Service	Expenditures	Expenditure Percentages
Assistance with USCIS N-400 Application	\$910,935	55.0%
USCIS Fingerprint Fee	\$0	0.0%
USCIS N-400 Application Fee	\$0	0.0%
Disability Exception Assistance - USCIS N648 Form	\$83,775	5.1%
Citizenship Training Hours	\$199,635	12.0%
Appeals	\$1,250	0.1%
Interview Preparation	\$44,800	2.7%
Interview Assistance	\$18,945	1.1%
Annual Performance Outcome Goal Achievement	\$335,660	20.3%
Specialized Naturalization Services (Specialized Project)	\$41,600	2.5%
Annual Performance Outcome Goal Achievement (Specialized Project)	\$10,400	0.6%
40-hour Basic Immigration Law Training	\$10,000	0.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,657,000</b>	<b>100%</b>

### PROGRAM OUTCOMES

In SFY 2018, the Naturalization Services program had:

- 2,869 unduplicated clients that received naturalization services, of which 551 (19 percent) were Outreach participants.
- 1,069 naturalization completions reported for the total unduplicated

caseload.

Although the main performance outcome goal for this program is completed naturalizations, given the challenges and complexities of this process for many of the clients, the program also tracks specific activities associated with the naturalization process as outcomes and payment points for billings.

The following reflects reported payment points outcome data for SFY 2018, with a four-year look-back:

**SFY 2014-2018 Outcomes**

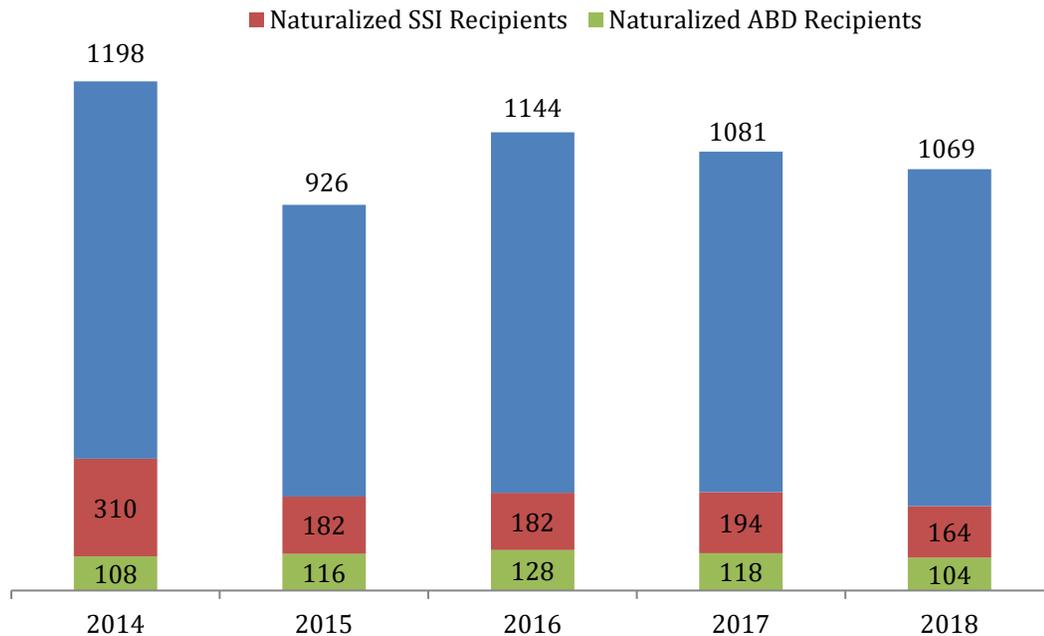
<b>Service</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018<sup>11</sup></b>
Application Assistance	1,638	1,580	1,599	1,700	1658
USCIS Fingerprint Fee	2	0	0	0	0
USCIS N-400 Application Fee	2	0	0	0	0
Disability Exception Assistance - USCIS N648 Form	193	253	235	233	305
Citizenship Training Hours	24,624 Hours	25,490 Hours	18,069 Hours	16,771 Hours	19,963.5 Hours
Naturalization Completion Follow-up	1,198	926	1,144	1,082	1069
Appeals	4	5	2	1	5
Interview Preparation	568	532	505	426	448
Interview Assistance	138	129	270	197	191
Technical Assistance (Specialized Project)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	94
Case Analysis (Specialized Project)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	18 <sup>12</sup>
Trainings to other DSHS Providers (Specialized Project)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2

<sup>11</sup> Data Source: RIA, ACES Database Warehouse as of 10/10/2018.

<sup>12</sup> Naturalization Completion was not a part of the Specialized Naturalization Services Project's performance outcome goal in SFY 2018 because the USCIS processing time has averaged approximately 16 – 18 months for naturalization applications with non-complex cases.

The following chart shows the number of clients who have been granted U.S. citizenship status through the naturalization process from SFY 2014-2018, with breakout counts for SSI and ABD recipients who have naturalized:

**Total Number of Naturalized Participants, SFY 2014-2018<sup>13</sup>**



The actual number of naturalized individuals is likely much higher than captured here, because participants may neglect to report their naturalization to service contractors. 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.

**BARRIERS TO NATURALIZATION**

The application process for naturalizing is very complicated, and even a simple mistake can delay processing. It is also very costly; the current naturalization fee is \$725 per person (includes application fee and mandatory fingerprint fee). Low-income immigrants find the cost for professional assistance combined with the naturalization fees prohibitive, and without DSHS’s free Naturalization Services program, many might not attempt to apply to naturalize.

<sup>13</sup> Data Source: RIA, ACES Database Warehouse as of 10/10/2018.

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. Contractors are required to assist participants in submitting a fee waiver request and help them gather the documentation they need to support their request. In SFY 2018, Contractors reported helping participants submit 1,658 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.

Changes made in 2013 to the naturalization examination format continue to make the naturalization process more difficult for refugees and immigrants who are applying to become U.S. citizens. The current examination format has moved away from civics trivia to emphasize instead, 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 tests the applicant's understanding of how the federalist papers included the ratification of the U.S. Constitution. USCIS hoped that the revised test would encourage attachment to the principles of citizenship<sup>14</sup>.

DSHS and service providers are working to mitigate barriers to the naturalization process by helping participants overcome anxieties and barriers 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: \$640 application fee and \$85 for the mandatory fingerprint fee

Another barrier in the naturalization process relates to Medical Disability Waivers. Over the last couple of years, DSHS contractors have been experiencing an increased level of disability waiver denials by USCIS. A disability waiver allows disabled clients, particularly those with mental

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<sup>14</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)

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 both the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement and USCIS recognizes this issue and have previously organized discussions 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.

ORIA collaborates with the City of Seattle’s Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (OIRA) to coordinate and address with USCIS the challenges that many contractors face in obtaining an approval of the N-648 Disability Exception Requests for refugee and immigrant clients. The rejection of the N-648s greatly affects the increased time contractors need to spend to resubmit applications, and denials of N-648s may have resulted in some refugee clients losing SSI benefits for failure to naturalize within the seven-year federal timeline. To improve performance, USCIS is training immigration officers to handle disability waiver requests, and offering more trainings to stakeholders to improve the ways that the medical experts are completing the disability waiver requirements.

The Department recognizes the service providers who contract with DSHS as playing a key role in identifying issues, strategies and solutions to help address barriers to naturalization. ORIA hosted stakeholder meetings throughout the SFY 2018 program year to discuss outreach to clients, program successes and challenges and contracting structure. The intent is to work together to modify the program to improve the quality and effectiveness of the naturalization program.

## **ATTACHMENT A**

### **BASIC INFORMATION ON BECOMING A UNITED STATES CITIZEN**

#### **Who is eligible?**

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

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

- Be at least 18 years old;
- Have been present in the U.S. as a Permanent Resident 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 U.S. history and government test;
- Have good moral character;
- Understand and accept the oath of allegiance to the U.S.; 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, 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 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 (\$640) and fingerprint fee (\$85) to USCIS. The process takes approximately 16 - 18 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 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 U.S. 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.

## **ATTACHMENT 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.

## ATTACHMENT C

### SFY 2018 NATURALIZATION CONTRACTS

<b>Contractor</b>	<b>Contract Amount</b>
<b>REGION 1</b>	
La Casa Hogar	\$ 60,000
World Relief – Spokane	\$ 208,710
World Relief – Tri Cities	<u>\$ 92,000</u>
Region 1 Total	\$ 360,710
<b>REGION 2</b>	
City of Seattle	\$ 425,000
International Rescue Committee	\$ 60,000
Refugee & Immigrant Services NW	\$ 165,000
Refugee Federation Service Center	\$ 87,700
Ukrainian Community Center of WA	<u>\$ 52,250</u>
Region 2 Total	\$ 789,950
<b>REGION 3</b>	
Korean Women’s Association	\$ 140,000
Lutheran Community Services NW (Clark & King Counties)	\$ 194,165
Multicultural Self-Sufficiency Movement	\$ 55,000
Tacoma Community House	<u>\$ 55,175</u>
Region 3 Total	\$ 444,340
<b>STATEWIDE</b>	
NW Immigrant Rights Project (Specialized Project)	<u>\$ 52,000</u>
Statewide Total	\$ 52,000
<b>BUILDING SERVICE CAPACITY</b>	
Collaboration with City of Seattle, King County, and OneAmerica (40-Hr Basic Immigration Law Training)	<u>\$ 10,000</u>
Building Service Capacity Total	\$ 10,000
<b>TOTAL CONTRACT AMOUNT</b>	<b>\$1,657,000</b>