



U.S. citizenship application wait time has doubled since 2016, Colorado panel's report says

Caitlin Curley

September 15, 2019

Applicants for U.S. citizenship are waiting months longer than they are supposed to, a report says.

More than 700,000 applications are backlogged, according to a report released last week by the Colorado State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. It's a delay that experts at the University of Colorado say could impact civil rights.

"Naturalizing is an important step in America, and impediments on the ability to naturalize have negative consequences for civil rights, voting rights and the democratic process," said CU law associate professor Ming Hsu Chen in a statement. "That is a key concern for the state advisory committee and the commission. Yet naturalization is about more than elections. It is about civic engagement and belonging in America."

Professors and students at the University of Colorado Law School in Boulder contributed to the report, which found that the Denver immigration office has an average wait time of 10 months, though it is legally required to process applications within 120 days, the report says. Nationally, the average is 10.1 months, up from 5.6 months in 2016.

The report suggests that the increase could come from policy changes and increased requests for evidence following naturalization interviews. Among recent changes is a move to turn away immigrants who are found likely to need public assistance.

After President Donald Trump campaigned on issues including a crackdown on illegal immigration, a number of steps have been taken by federal agencies that make it harder for some applicants to gain citizenship.

Last fall, the Cato Institute think tank found that the number of applicants denied citizenship grew rapidly under Trump.

"New data from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, the agency that adjudicates immigration applications, show that denials have jumped significantly," Cato found, noting that 11 percent of citizenship-seekers were turned away in 2017.