



## Records Preservation & Access Committee

Federation of Genealogical Societies, National Genealogical Society,  
International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies

December 12, 2019

Samantha Deshommes, Chief  
Regulatory Coordination Division  
Office of Policy and Strategy  
US Citizenship and Immigration Services  
Department of Homeland Security  
20 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Mailstop #2140  
Washington, DC 25029-2140

RE: DHS Docket No. USCIS-2019-0010  
USCIS Genealogy Records Program

Dear Ms. Deshommes:

I am writing on behalf of the Records Preservation and Access Committee (RPAC) in response to the Proposed Rule dated November 14, 2019 and referenced above, which if implemented, would increase the fees to access records from USCIS by an exorbitant amount. Although the proposed rule says the overall increase would be twenty-one (21%) percent, the increase to genealogists for Alien Registration Files and some C-Files would be a 269% increase from \$65 to \$240 for and a 492% increase from \$65 to \$385 for A-Files, Visa Files, Registry Files and some C-Files. Moreover, to obtain file numbers for most of the latter records, the \$240 index search fee would be required, a 481% increase from the current costs of \$130 to \$625. This increase is further unconscionable because these same fees increased just three years ago.

Genealogy has been the second largest use of the internet during the current decade. During the last ten years it has been more difficult and expensive to access records through USCIS than other repositories such as the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).

The proposed increase raises several questions that need to be answered before any fee increase should be considered:

1. Why have A-Files of immigrants born more than 100 years ago not been transferred to NARA when the USCIS retention schedule called for them to be transferred beginning in 2009?
2. Visa Files and Registry Files have been eligible for transfer to NARA since April 2019. What are the plans for their transfer?
3. Alien Registration Forms are on microfilm at NARA. Why can't they be released for public access at NARA facilities, saving USCIS time and genealogists the higher fees?

4. Is USCIS delaying the scheduled transfer of documents to NARA just so they can generate revenue by overcharging for their services?

Genealogists are willing to pay reasonable fees for access to records. We offer several alternatives to the proposed pricing structure in the following order of preference:

1. Transfer all files eligible for transfer to the National Archives in accordance with schedules already in place where many of the records would be available for free at the National Archives or its Branches.
2. Provide statistics on the average time it took to retrieve all types of USCIS files in 2018 and charge an hourly rate not to exceed \$40 per hour in increments of one-quarter hour for the time spent. We anticipate the resulting fees would be much less than proposed. It is our understanding many files have been indexed and each file should be produced within one to two hours for a total fee not to exceed \$80 which is much less than the proposed \$240 or \$385.
3. We understand USCIS cannot transfer many older A-files because those files were never added to their Central Index System (CIS). As a result, USCIS cannot find the files nor provide them to requesters. USCIS must develop and implement a plan to add these files to CIS so all eligible A-files can transfer to NARA.

The Records Preservation and Access Committee (RPAC) is sponsored by the Federation of Genealogical Societies, the National Genealogical Society, and the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies, and supported by the Association of Professional Genealogists (APG), the Board for Certification of Genealogists (BCG), the American Society of Genealogists (ASG), and the International Commission for the Accreditation of Professional Genealogists (ICAPGen).

The genealogical societies and professional organizations listed above represent several thousand local, state, and regional societies, with more than 400,000 members researching family history, and over 2,000 professional and forensic genealogists. Professional and board certified genealogists perform important work which includes tracking relatives with possible inheritable diseases; working with coroners to identify unclaimed persons; finding next of kin of unclaimed persons for repatriation of military remains; heir research; proving Native American tribal membership; adoption cases; land disputes; and oil and gas leases. As reported by Voice of America News, September 26, 2013, "Genealogy, in fact, has become a global phenomenon. A market research firm, Global Industry Analysts, says there are more than 80 million professional and amateur genealogists around the world." Based upon recent Alexa rankings, *Ancestry.com* has 38,890 visitors a day, followed by *MyHeritage* with 11,870 and *FindAGrave* with 11,310 daily visitors per *HouseholdQuotes.co.uk*.

The following organizations support and sign-on to the statements above.

If you have any questions, I can be reached at [janalpert@aol.com](mailto:janalpert@aol.com) or by phone at 804-304-5874.

Sincerely,

Records Preservation and Access Committee

*Janet A. Alpert*

Janet A. Alpert, Chair

cc: David S. Ferriero, Archivist of the United States, [David.ferriero@nara.gov](mailto:David.ferriero@nara.gov)  
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