

Statement for the Record
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Hearing on Comprehensive Immigration Reform: Government Perspectives
on Immigration Statistics

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Introduction

Good afternoon, Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member King, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the role of the Office of Immigration Statistics (OIS) at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), to provide an overview of our recent immigrant population estimates, and to answer any additional questions you may have.

OIS Overview

OIS is part of the DHS Policy Directorate and our mission is to lead the development of statistical information useful in making decisions and analyzing the effects of immigration in the United States. We publish reports each year on recent trends in legal immigration, persons naturalized, and aliens apprehended and removed from the United States. We also provide analyses and estimates to support policy makers as they work to understand immigration trends before setting policy, for example, on the number of foreign residents in the United States by legal status.

Immigration Population Estimates and Trends

I want to briefly provide you a summary of recent estimates, beginning with the number of persons who may be in the United States unlawfully.

We estimate that there were approximately 10.5 million unlawful residents in the United States as of January 1, 2005, and project that there may be as many as 12 million here as of now.

About 57 percent of the unlawful residents are from Mexico, and nearly half of the 12 million

residents live in California, Texas, or Florida. The average annual net growth in the number of unlawful residents has been 500,000 a year since 1990. DHS has not estimated other characteristics of this difficult to measure population.

Turning to legal immigration, the DHS has granted lawful permanent resident (LPR) status to an average of 1.1 million persons during the past three years (See Table 1). More than 4 out of 10 of these immigrants are immediate relatives of U.S. citizens who are admitted without limitation. The next leading categories are family-sponsored preference immigrants (19 percent), employment-based preference immigrants (17 percent), and refugees or asylees (13 percent). About 1 of 4 immigrants derives their status through a spouse or parent.

We estimate that there were approximately 11.6 million lawful permanent residents in the United States as of October 2004 and that 8.0 million were eligible to naturalize. Approximately 60 percent of legal immigrants admitted during the 1970's and 1980's had naturalized as of 2005 (see Chart 1). More recent immigrants are naturalizing sooner than earlier immigrants, though it is not known whether this will result in lifetime naturalization rates higher than 60 percent. About 33 percent of immigrants admitted before 1986 had naturalized after 10 years, while between 45 and 50 percent of immigrants admitted from 1992-95 had naturalized after 10 years of residence.

In addition to the immigrants that have been admitted and are living in the United States, there are other aliens who have applied for but are waiting to obtain lawful permanent resident status. The total number of petitioners for LPR status who are waiting to immigrate must be estimated because there is little information available on the number with an approved petition who are

already in the United States, or on the number with a pending petition at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) who may be living either inside or outside the United States.

Conclusion

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman, for the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Table 1.

**Average Annual Number of Persons Granted Lawful Permanent Resident Status
By Major Category of Admission and Principal/Derivative Status: Fiscal Years 2004 to 2006**

Category of Admission	Total		Principals		Derivatives	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	1,115,507	100.0	842,850	100.0	272,657	100.0
<i>Family-sponsored preferences</i>	<i>216,518</i>	<i>19.4</i>	<i>134,282</i>	<i>15.9</i>	<i>82,236</i>	<i>30.2</i>
Unmarried sons/daughters of U.S. citizens	25,514	2.3	18,482	2.2	7,031	2.6
Spouses and children of alien residents	101,933	9.1	84,619	10.0	17,314	6.4
Married sons/daughters of U.S. citizens	24,380	2.2	7,616	0.9	16,764	6.1
Siblings of U.S. citizens	64,692	5.8	23,565	2.8	41,127	15.1
<i>Immediate relatives of U.S. citizens</i>	<i>478,810</i>	<i>42.9</i>	<i>478,443</i>	<i>56.8</i>	<i>367</i>	<i>0.1</i>
Spouses	283,727	25.4	283,727	33.7	0	0.0
Parents	93,363	8.4	93,363	11.1	0	0.0
Children	101,087	9.1	100,720	11.9	367	0.1
Children born abroad to alien residents	634	0.1	634	0.1	0	0.0
<i>Employment-based preferences</i>	<i>187,096</i>	<i>16.8</i>	<i>86,157</i>	<i>10.2</i>	<i>100,939</i>	<i>37.0</i>
Priority workers	44,327	4.0	18,223	2.2	26,104	9.6
Professionals with advanced degrees	32,347	2.9	15,540	1.8	16,807	6.2
Skilled workers, professionals, unskilled workers	101,654	9.1	48,128	5.7	53,526	19.6
Special immigrants	8,360	0.7	4,128	0.5	4,232	1.6
Investors	408	0.0	138	0.0	270	0.1
<i>Diversity programs</i>	<i>46,930</i>	<i>4.2</i>	<i>24,358</i>	<i>2.9</i>	<i>22,571</i>	<i>8.3</i>
<i>Refugees and Asylees</i>	<i>143,549</i>	<i>12.9</i>	<i>78,878</i>	<i>9.4</i>	<i>64,671</i>	<i>23.7</i>
Refugee adjustments	91,099	8.2	51,042	6.1	40,057	14.7
Asylee adjustments	52,449	4.7	27,836	3.3	24,614	9.0
<i>Other categories</i>	<i>42,604</i>	<i>3.8</i>	<i>40,731</i>	<i>4.8</i>	<i>1,873</i>	<i>0.7</i>

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Computer Linked Application Information Management System (CLAIMS), Legal Immigrant Data, Fiscal Years 2004 to 2006.

Chart 1. Cumulative Naturalization Rates Through 2005 for Legal Permanent Residents (LPRs) Ages 16 Years and Over by Year LPR Status Obtained: 1975-1995

