



August 25, 2026

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Policy Alert

SUBJECT: Investigations and Examinations for Naturalization Eligibility

Purpose

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is issuing policy guidance in the [USCIS Policy Manual](#) to further assess and corroborate the eligibility of aliens applying for naturalization. The guidance reintroduces personal investigations, also known as neighborhood investigations, under section 335(a) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) and reinforces the need to validate the alien's information and documentation as part of the naturalization examination under INA 335(b).

Background

Section 335 emerged as a component of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) of 1952, establishing a framework for the investigation and examination of aliens applying for naturalization. With this statutory authority USCIS (formerly Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS)) can conduct investigations of the alien applying for naturalization (referred to as neighborhood investigations).¹ The INA also incorporated the previous designated examiner system from the Nationality Act of 1940² into INA 335(b).³

By 1991, the INS had abandoned neighborhood investigations.⁴ Legacy INS instead relied almost exclusively on criminal history checks performed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and other security checks to obtain information bearing on the alien's "good moral character."

USCIS is exercising its statutory authority in INA 335(a) to end the general waiver of neighborhood investigations. Resumption of the neighborhood investigations helps USCIS ensure that aliens applying for naturalization meet statutory requirements, including, but not limited to, full attachment to the principles of the U.S. Constitution and disposition to the good order and happiness of the United States.⁵ USCIS Fraud Detection and National Security Directorate, in coordination with USCIS Field Operations Directorate, makes the decision to conduct or waive neighborhood

¹ See Section 335(a) of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, [Pub. L. 82-414](#), 66 Stat. 163, 255 (June 27, 1952). See [INA 335\(a\)](#).

² See Nationality Act of 1940, [Pub. L. 76-853](#) (October 14, 1940) (repealed 1952).

³ See Section 335(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, [Pub. L. 82-414](#), 66 Stat. 163, 255 (June 27, 1952). See [INA 335\(b\)](#).

⁴ See Chapter III of the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Inspector General's Special Report on An Investigation of the INS's Citizenship USA Initiative, [Report No. OIG-01-16](#) (July 1, 2000).

⁵ See [INA 316\(a\)](#).

investigations based on an individualized and discretionary review of relevant evidence contained in the alien's record or review of classes of cases. This rigorous process enhances the integrity of the naturalization process and protects the interests of the United States.

This guidance, contained in Volume 12 of the Policy Manual, is effective immediately and applies to requests pending or filed on or after the publication date. The guidance contained in the Policy Manual is controlling and supersedes any related prior guidance.

Policy Highlights

- Provides USCIS conducts neighborhood investigations under INA 335(a).
- Provides USCIS may waive a neighborhood investigation, at its discretion, if USCIS determines that the waiver of the investigation is appropriate in a particular case or classes of cases.
- Provides aliens applying for naturalization may voluntarily provide testimonial or character reference letters preferably from U.S. citizens who are not family members who attest to the alien's eligibility, character, loyalty to the United States and attachment to the principles of the U.S. Constitution and other naturalization requirements.
- Provides USCIS takes into consideration voluntarily provided testimonials or character reference letters in determining whether to waive a neighborhood investigation.
- Reaffirms that USCIS examines all factors relating to the alien's eligibility for naturalization.
- Provides that USCIS confirms information provided by the applicant through documents, information obtained during the investigation or testimony at the interview.

Summary of Changes

Affected Section: Volume 12 Citizenship and Naturalization

- Retitles former Part B (Naturalization Examination) as Part B (Investigation and Examination of Alien).

Affected Section: Volume 12 > Part B > Chapter 1, Purpose and Background

- Revises Section A (Purpose) and Section B (Background) in their entirety.

Affected Section: Volume 12 > Part B > Chapter 2, Background Investigation and Security Checks

- Retitles former Chapter 2 (Background and Security Checks) as Chapter 2 (Background Investigation and Security Checks).
- Revises chapter in its entirety.

Affected Section: Volume 12 > Part B > Chapter 3, Naturalization Interview

- Retitles former Chapter 3 (Naturalization Interview) to Chapter 3 (Naturalization Examination).
- Revises Section A (Roles and Responsibilities) throughout.
- In Section B (Preliminary Review of Application) revises first paragraph of Subsection 2 (Jurisdiction for Application), revises Subsection 3 (Results of Background and Security Checks), and revises Subsection 4 (Other Documents or Requests in the Record) throughout.
- Retitles former Section C (Initial Naturalization Examination) to Section C (Interview) and revises the bulleted list and following two paragraphs.
- Retitles former Section D (Subsequent Re-examination) to Section D (Subsequent Interview).

USCIS may also make other minor technical, stylistic, and conforming changes consistent with this update.

Citation

Volume 12: Citizenship and Naturalization, Part B, Investigation and Examination of Alien, Chapter 1, Purpose and Background [[12 USCIS-PM B.1](#)]; Chapter 2, Background Investigation and Security Checks [[12 USCIS-PM B.2](#)]; and Chapter 3, Naturalization Examination [[12 USCIS-PM B.3](#)].

Additional Considerations

Administrative Procedure Act (APA)

USCIS is issuing this guidance to support and implement portions in furtherance of Executive Order 14159, Protecting the American People Against Invasion,⁶ specifically Section 2, which requires faithful execution of immigration laws against all removable aliens, particularly those who threaten the safety or security of the American people, and Executive Order 14161, Protecting the United States From Foreign Terrorists and Other National Security and Public Safety Threats,⁷ Section 2(a)(iii), which provides the re-establishment of a uniform baseline for screening and vetting standards and procedures for any alien seeking a visa or immigration benefit of any kind, and Section 2(a)(iv), which requires the vetting and screening to the maximum degree possible of aliens who are already inside the United States.

⁶ See [90 FR 8443](#) (Jan. 29, 2025).

⁷ See [90 FR 8451](#) (Jan. 30, 2025).

On August 22, 2025, Director Edlow issued a Policy Memorandum, Resumption of Personal Investigations of Aliens Applying for Naturalization (INA 335(a)).⁸ Since that time, USCIS has conducted a number of neighborhood investigations consistent with its statutory authority. Neighborhood investigations provide USCIS with information that interviews and documents may not be able to provide, such as unrehearsed observations/information about the applicant that can inform other forms of vetting and screening. Routinely waiving neighborhood investigations without engaging in careful assessment of whether such investigations would be helpful in a particular case limited USCIS' ability to obtain this additional information and might have prevented USCIS from learning information that was relevant to the adjudication. Where necessary, information provided by members of the community about the alien's character and activities assists USCIS in fully determining whether the alien meets all requirements for naturalization, including whether the alien is attached to the U.S. Constitution, is well disposed to the good order and happiness of the United States, has good moral character and is not ineligible for naturalization due to advocating, teaching, or being affiliated with an organization that advocates or teaches certain doctrines, such as the overthrow of the U.S. government or the unlawful assaulting or killing of U.S. government officers.

USCIS is affirmatively committed to enhancing the screening and vetting of all aliens applying for naturalization. Aliens do not have any reliance interests related to the prior blanket waiver of neighborhood investigations and non-enforcement policy that preceded the implementation of the August 22, 2025 Policy Memorandum however, assuming *arguendo* that such a reliance interest is found to exist, USCIS interests in robustly enforcing the INA outweigh such reliance interests.

⁸ See Resumption of Personal Investigations of Aliens Applying for Naturalization (INA 335(a)), PM-602-0189, issued August 22, 2025.