

# Citizens Services Employee / Team

Department of Homeland Security  
Citizenship and Immigration Services



## Summary:

The US Citizenship and Immigration Services, Chicago Field Office, Citizenship Unit, ensured that the mission of the Agency was carried out even through times of crisis from COVID-19. This Team's commitment and innovation ensured that, since office reopening, over 12,500 new American citizens have now joined the fabric of the United States.

**Description:** As the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the United States, US Citizenship and Immigration Services' Chicago Field Office, like its other offices across the United States, closed its doors to the public. Thousands of individuals were, however, still eagerly awaiting their opportunity to take their last step to becoming U.S. Citizens: attending their naturalization ceremony and taking the Oath of Allegiance.

The Citizenship Team, from a largely telework environment, developed a comprehensive plan to safely begin resuming naturalizations. This required carefully crafted details and skilled execution. Small groups would replace gatherings of over 125. Waiting rooms which previously held hundreds of applicants awaiting appointments, would be converted into socially distanced ceremony rooms. Employees and new citizens would don masks and plexiglass would separate people at check-in.

When they reopened in June 2020, the Team, supplemented by colleagues from all components of the office, was ready. They knew that while the pomp and circumstance of naturalization ceremonies could no longer be a 30-45 minute event with guests, the ceremonies still needed to be meaningful. To that end, employees put in 110% daily to deliver the same experience in a shorter package. At the very first ceremony held at the office reopening, the field office director shared with the new citizens that he regretted that many traditional elements of the ceremony were changed: their families weren't present, the ceremony was abbreviated and no one could shake hands. But he celebrated the importance of the day, their accomplishment of becoming a US Citizen and shared how we would make it through this crisis together as Americans. This spirit of dedication was then delivered by the Citizenship Unit daily in the Field Office in what turned out to be an astonishing 262 pint size ceremonies over the first two months after reopening.

The Team soon began partnering again with the federal courts. The courtyard of the federal building was transformed into an open-air courtroom. Jury assembly rooms which lie empty were converted, where judges administered the Oath of Allegiance. Of note, the Team assembled 38 candidates from 16 countries to take part in the office's first remote ceremony, held in the Field Office auditorium. Linked through video feed, a US Magistrate Judge of the Central District of Illinois presided over the ceremony. On site a Supervisory Immigration Services Officer emceed, and an Immigration Services Officer delivered the motion for admission to citizenship.

Over the months since office reopening, and through the ups and downs of the COVID 19 pandemic, the Citizenship Unit team's commitment to the agency, and to carrying out its mission, shone through. It is because of this commitment that we have been able to achieve extraordinary successes, even while in crisis. Because of the Team's persistence, in delivering on the mission, Chicago Field Office has sworn in over 12,500 new American citizens since early June 2020. These 12,500 new American citizens can now register to vote, petition for family members and have now reached the finale of their immigration journey.