

ECONOMIC SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

Expand Naturalization Services



2015-17 BIENNIAL BUDGET

Request	FY16	FY17	15-17
FTE	0.0	0.0	0.0
GF-State	\$940,000	\$940,000	\$1,880,000
Total	\$940,000	\$940,000	\$1,880,000

DECISION PACKAGE SUMMARY

The Economic Services Administration (ESA) requests \$1,880,000 GF-State to expand the naturalization program. By funding this request, ESA is expected to provide needed assistance with the process of becoming a naturalized United States (U.S.) citizen to a greater number of legal immigrants.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Naturalization is the process by which U.S. citizenship is conferred upon a legal immigrant after he or she fulfills the requirements established under the Immigration and Nationality Act. To become a naturalized citizen, a legal immigrant generally must learn basic U.S. history and civics and pass a written or oral exam given in English by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS). RCW 74.08A requires the department to provide naturalization services to legal immigrants who receive public assistance.

Attainment of citizenship, along with English language acquisition, economic self-sufficiency, and education are key indicators of successful integration. Naturalization helps stabilize families as immigrants who naturalize receive the right to vote and are able to participate in civic engagement. In addition, elderly or disabled immigrants who entered the U.S. as refugees can only receive federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits for seven years unless they become U.S. citizens. Those who lose SSI due to the seven year time limit become eligible for the state funded Aged, Blind, and Disabled program.

ESA coordinates naturalization services by contracting statewide with approximately 15 community-based organizations to provide citizenship services to eligible immigrants. The major components of naturalization services include screening each potential applicant to determine if he or she should apply for citizenship, assistance in completing and filing applications, preparing fee waiver requests, assistance in obtaining a medical disability exception completed and signed by a physician, citizenship preparation training, interview preparation and assistance during the interview.

In the 2011-2013 and 2013-2015 Biennial Budgets, the Legislature appropriated \$3,314,000 GF-State for each biennium for naturalization services. This is a reduction from the 2009-2011 Biennium when the appropriation for these services was \$5,684,000. The reduction in funding resulted in a decrease in the number of clients the department is able to serve. In Fiscal Year 2010, ESA served 4,277 participants, compared to Fiscal Year 2013, when 3,110 participants were served.



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As a result of the funding reduction, many of the contractors run out of funding for naturalization services well before the end of the contract period. In Fiscal Year 2014, contractors began to exhaust their contract funding as early as September. Some contractors continued providing services with other funds and some began to charge clients for services. Charging for naturalization services creates hardship for these low-income families as they receive public assistance benefits and are struggling to achieve self-sufficiency.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

ESA requests an increase in GF-State funds for naturalization services from the current funding level of \$3,314,000 per biennium to \$5,194,000, an increase of \$1,880,000. The increased funding will enable contractors to continue providing naturalization services through the entire year.

The increase was determined by calculating the rate of expenditures of contractors who have run out of contract funds or will run out of funds by the end of the fiscal year and projecting the amount of funding they would need to provide services through the entire year. In addition, some providers who ran out of funding began tracking the number of requests for services they receive after their contract funds were expended and calculating the funding they would have needed to meet those requests.

EXPECTED RESULTS

The budget request supports DSHS Goal 4 and ESA Strategic Objective 4: Quality of Life – Each individual in need will be supported to attain the highest possible quality of life.

This request supports the Results Washington goal for healthy and safe communities.

In Fiscal Year 2013, ESA served 3,110 clients in the naturalization program at a cost per client of approximately \$532. The requested increase will allow ESA to provide the naturalization services to an additional 1,764 eligible legal immigrants per year.

STAKEHOLDER IMPACT

This request will enable ESA to provide naturalization assistance services to more clients. ESA does not expect any stakeholders to have any concerns; many will support the proposal.



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