

National Hispanic Leadership Agenda

July 13, 2017

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Re: NHLA Opposition to the Confirmation of Lee Francis Cissna as Director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda (NHLA), a coalition of the nation's 45 leading Latino advocacy organizations, we respectfully urge you to vote against the confirmation of Lee Francis Cissna as Director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). **Any votes associated with this nominee may be included in future NHLA scorecards evaluating the support of Members of Congress for the Latino community.**

NHLA's policy agenda and the work of its member organizations call for federal immigration, asylum, and naturalization policies that respect the dignity of the individual, end the criminalization of Hispanic immigrants, and reflect our nation's commitment to human and civil rights. Mr. Cissna's work contradicts these goals.

In his testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee, Mr. Cissna admitted his role in helping the Trump Administration draft executive orders that would expand deportation priorities to cover 8 million immigrants and ban refugees and nationals from seven majority-Muslim nations. Previously, he worked on detail to the Senate Judiciary Committee, during which time he was involved in developing or advancing a number of policy positions harmful to Latinos and Latino families, including:

- 1) advancing arguments against policies that would allow refugee children from Central America to be reunited with their parents in the U.S.;
- 2) raising doubts about the legitimacy of asylum claims by Latin American nationals seeking refuge in the U.S.;
- 3) spreading hyperbolic assertions about the number of refugees from Latin America seeking admittance to the U.S.;
- 4) opposing a USCIS policy that provides beneficiaries of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) the ability to travel outside the U.S. under specific circumstances; and
- 5) calling for restrictions on the U-Visa program, a critical visa program for immigrants who are the victims of crime, violence, and human trafficking.

MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

Alianza Americas
American G.I. Forum
ASPIRA Association
Avance Inc.
Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network
Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute
Farmworker Justice
Green Latinos
Hispanic Association of Colleges & Universities
Hispanic Federation
Hispanic National Bar Association
Inter-University Program for Latino Research
Labor Council for Latin American Advancement
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
League of United Latin American Citizens
MANA, A National Latina Organization
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund
Mi Familia Vota
National Association of Latino Arts and Cultures
National Association of Hispanic Federal Executives
National Association of Hispanic Publications
National Day Laborer Organizing Network
NALEO Educational Fund
National Association of Latino Independent Producers
National Conference of Puerto Rican Women, Inc.
National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators
National Hispanic Council on Aging
National Hispanic Environmental Council
National Hispanic Foundation for the Arts
National Hispanic Media Coalition
National Hispanic Medical Association
National Institute for Latino Policy
National Latina/o Psychological Association
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
Presente.org
SER Jobs for Progress National
Southwest Voter Registration Education Project
UnidosUS
United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
United States Hispanic Leadership Institute
United States-Mexico Chamber of Commerce
U.S.- Mexico Foundation
Voto Latino

Mr. Cissna's work fails to demonstrate a balanced understanding of immigrants as contributors to the economic, social, and cultural fabric of our nation. Rather, his work shows that he portrays immigrants in the most negative light possible. At the helm of USCIS, Mr. Cissna would be expected to oversee a wide variety of immigration services and responsibilities. These services include adjudicating immigration benefits, conducting naturalizations, granting legal permanent resident status, carrying out background checks and biometrics for applicants, providing assistance to customers navigating the USCIS system, conducting employment checks, and processing refugee applications, among many others.

Given the role of the USCIS director to enforce the law fairly, process various immigration applications, and facilitate the naturalization of immigrants, Mr. Cissna is not an appropriate choice for Director of this agency. This position should be filled by a qualified candidate who is committed to treating immigrants with respect and compassion, and who will work to ensure the agency operates fairly and efficiently in order to provide its customers with unbiased services and attention. NHLA therefore urges you to vote against Mr. Cissna's confirmation as Director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

Sincerely,



Thomas A. Saenz
NHLA Immigration Committee Co-Chair
MALDEF, President and General Counsel



Jose Calderón
NHLA Immigration Committee Co-Chair
Hispanic Federation, President