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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6025
<http://appropriations.senate.gov>

June 23, 2020

Russell T. Vought
Acting Director
Executive Office of the President
Office of Management and Budget
Washington D.C. 20503

Dear Mr. Vought:

Earlier this month, I spoke with USCIS Deputy Director for Policy, Joseph Edlow, about an anticipated budget shortfall at the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). While there is considerable disagreement over the cause of this shortfall, the impacts of coronavirus have undoubtedly exacerbated the issue. During this call, Deputy Director Edlow informally requested \$1.2 billion in emergency funding to help USCIS continue operations through the end of the calendar year and avoid having to furlough thousands of employees this summer.

The letter you sent to me on June 19, 2020, while expressing support of USCIS, did not contain a request for emergency funding, which would be required even if the Congress were to approve your proposed cost recovery surcharge. In fact, the Appropriations Committee has not received any requests from the White House or the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for emergency appropriations to address the many devastating impacts of the coronavirus pandemic since March 17th. This is a shocking failure of leadership given the crisis facing the country today.

I share Deputy Director Edlow's concern regarding the projected shortfall at USCIS and its potential impact on critical services and USCIS employees. USCIS plays an important role in our nation's immigration system, processing requests for immigration benefits, American citizenship, and screening asylum seekers. The agency is staffed by over 19,000 dedicated men and women across the country, including 1,700 in my home state of Vermont. Furloughs would not only lead to disruption in the critical services provided by the agency, but would cause unnecessary hardship on thousands of federal employees and federal contractors, and come at a time when our nation is already dealing with record job losses. We must craft a fair and responsible solution to this problem. This will require emergency appropriations and accompanying legislation to ensure transparency and accountability. Time is of the essence.

Unfortunately, despite numerous calls from myself and Democratic leadership in the Senate, the White House and the Republican Majority refuse to move forward on a fourth coronavirus emergency supplemental appropriations bill where we could address this and other critical issues caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has publicly stated that he and the White House want to take a “pause” before considering any further emergency legislation related to COVID-19, and has given no indication when that pause would end. This is irresponsible. Taking a “wait and see” approach will only exacerbate the devastating effects of this pandemic, hurt the American people, and weaken our economy. With respect to USCIS, the longer we wait, the more uncertainty grows as the threat of furloughs draw near.

The country needs leadership in this time of crisis. I ask that you show this leadership and join my call for quick and prompt action on a fourth coronavirus emergency appropriations bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Patrick Leahy". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

PATRICK LEAHY
Vice Chairman
Appropriations Committee

cc:

Chad Wolf, Acting Director, Department of Homeland Security
Joseph Edlow, Deputy Director for Policy, USCIS