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**MAYOR EMANUEL URGES CONGRESS TO ADDRESS BACKLOG
OF NATURALIZATION APPLICATIONS**

*Also announces launch of a new website for the Office of New Americans
during naturalization ceremony at the Chicago Cultural Center*

Mayor Rahm Emanuel today sent a letter to Congress urging legislators to appropriate funds to ensure the Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has enough resources to quickly address applications for citizenship from legal permanent residents without raising citizenship fees that are already too high. This year has been a record-breaking year for naturalization applications, with nearly one million applications submitted to the USCIS, but the increase in applications has created a backlog of more than 500,000 naturalization applications nationwide.

"Immigrants who become naturalized citizens are valued members of our neighborhoods and make significant contributions to our city and our country," said Mayor Emanuel. "The 52 people who today became citizens are eligible to cast a vote in today's election, but due to the backlog of naturalization applications, hundreds of thousands of immigrants across the country don't have that same privilege. It is my hope that Congress appropriates funds to USCIS to ensure that the agency can quickly process these applications without raising fees."

Mayor Emanuel delivered keynote remarks today at the eighth naturalization ceremony hosted by the City of Chicago as part of the City's New Americans Initiative. Fifty-two individuals – including two veterans - from 26 countries became citizens during the ceremony, which was held at the Chicago Cultural Center.

During the keynote remarks, Mayor Emanuel also announced the launch of a new [website](https://www.cityofchicago.org/officeofnewamericans) for the Office of New Americans (ONA), which is available in six languages: English, Spanish, Polish, Mandarin, Hindi and Arabic. The website houses resources and events available to new Americans across the City, as well as information about the ONA's initiatives, which include the Municipal ID program and educational opportunities like the STAR scholarship for undocumented students. The website is <https://www.cityofchicago.org/officeofnewamericans>.

The ONA was created by Mayor Emanuel as part of his efforts to make Chicago the most immigrant-friendly city in the world. Out of this effort came the Chicago New Americans Plan, developed by an advisory committee comprised of 50 Chicago leaders. This plan outlines a set of initiatives to welcome immigrants and maximize the contribution they make to Chicago. Improving the ability of Chicago's 560,000 foreign-born residents to contribute to our economy will lead to economic, social and cultural benefits to all Chicagoans.

The ONA has a new director, Seemi Choudry. The child of Pakistani immigrants, Choudry was born and raised in Venezuela before immigrating with her family to Chicago in the late 1990s. A graduate of Loyola University Chicago, Choudry has previously worked in community development, program management, conflict mediation and financial technology.

"I am thrilled to have the opportunity to help new Americans, and I'm ready to support the Mayor's efforts to ensure that Chicago is the most welcoming city in the world," said Choudry.

Since taking office, Mayor Emanuel has launched a series of initiatives that improve the immigrant community's access to service, expand new and existing immigrant businesses, and welcomes and celebrates Chicago's diverse immigrant communities. These initiatives include launching the Cities for Citizenship Campaign with the Mayors of New York City and Los Angeles, which has grown into a bipartisan effort which works with 30 City and county leaders across America.

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