

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY
Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement

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**BCIS TAKES FIRST STEP TOWARD
DEVELOPMENT OF NEW CITIZENSHIP TEST**

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Today, the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS) announced the launch of a pilot project to standardized the English, government, and United States history tests administered to citizenship applicants. The first phase of the two-stage pilot focuses on the English language portion of the test. The BCIS is working with a professional test development company on the effort.

"The long-range goal is to devise a test that will be fair, consistent, and meaningful for naturalization applicants nationwide," said William R. Yates, Acting Associate Director for Operations, BCIS. "The priority at the new Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services is ensuring that we not only meet but exceed our customers' expectations and that includes creating a level playing field for those seeking to become new Americans."

As part of the English language pilot, consenting citizenship applicants will be asked to answer one test question at the end of their regularly scheduled naturalization interview. The pilot will include questions designed to gauge reading, writing, and speaking skills. The applicant's response will not affect the outcome of the interview.

Five cities are slated to participate in this first phase of the naturalization test pilot - Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Antonio, Atlanta, and Newark. A BCIS team arrived in Newark today in order to train the officers who will administer the pilot and brief community-based organizations on the test redesign effort. Over the next three weeks, the team will travel to the other designated cities to implement the pilot in those locations.

To qualify for U.S. citizenship, applicants must demonstrate a basic understanding of English, including an ability to read, write, and speak the language. They must also be able to show that they know the fundamentals of U.S. history and government.

Currently, citizenship applicants are quizzed on these topics as part of the naturalization examination interview. The test questions are generally culled from a lengthy pre-approved list, but there is no standardized testing format or method for administering the questions. As a result, the test content and process can vary from officer to officer and from office to office.

"Whether you're a citizenship applicant in Sacramento or San Antonio, you should have the same set of expectations about what kind of test you will experience," said Gerri Ratliff, the BCIS project director for the test redesign effort. "Not only is it a matter of

fairness, but it will also help ensure that applicants come into the test fully prepared."

The U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform headed by former Congresswoman Barbara Jordan recommended that the naturalization testing process be standardized and the content be revamped to make it more relevant. The goal is to have a new naturalization test in place by late 2004.

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