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## **Humanitarian, Adjustment, Removing Conditions and Travel Documents (HART) Service Center One-Year Anniversary Engagement**

Date of Engagement: March 27, 2024

### **Speakers:**

Natasha Kirk, Office of Citizenship, Partnership, & Engagement in the Public Engagement Division

Connie Nolan, Associate Director, SCOPS

Tracey Parsons, Senior Advisor, SCOPS

Jonathan Micale, Acting Director, HART

Laurie Goudge, Acting Deputy Director, HART

Jennifer Mickey, Chief of Staff, HART

### **ASISTA Notes:**

#### ***USCIS Presentation***

***ASISTA Note:*** *USCIS has posted [their slides](#) to the [Electronic Reading Room](#).*

1. Overview
  - a. The HART Service Center is the 6th Service Center within Service Center Operations. We publicly announced the HART Service Center opening on March 30, 2023 but it has been adjudicating since January 29, 2023
  - b. 100% virtual service center
  - c. No geographical location
    - i. HART does not have a physical brick and mortar facility or location

- ii. HART will eventually be 100% virtual with no physical location. Until HART is fully digital, officers still have to come in, pick up their work, and take it home to their locations
  - d. Working across multiple time zones
  - e. Uses existing Service Centers for support with a hybrid approach – for receiving files, physical onsite paper-based file exchange, scanning, other paper-based activities, and a large one is receiving responses to NOIDs and RFEs
  - f. Allocated positions increased from 480 to 481, with addition of a permanent Chief of Staff so, when fully staffed, we will have 481 employees
  - g. HART exclusively processes following specific workloads:
    - i. I-360 VAWA
    - ii. I-601A, Application for Provisional Unlawful Presence Waiver
    - iii. I-730, Refugee/Asylee Relative Petition for Follow-to-Join Asylee
    - iv. I-918, Petition for U Nonimmigrant Status – Bona Fide Determination (BFD) only
    - v. These four workloads were previously shared across multiple service centers but are now consolidated at HART, including all the pending filings and are going to be adjudicated by specially trained officers. This not only helps us centralize it but helps us improve efficiency and getting consistency
    - vi. Ultimately, the goal is to bring the additional humanitarian and other work-related HART Service Center workloads into HART. But for right now, we're just focusing on building the foundation of employees, getting our functions situated, and addressing the backlog in the four form types identified. When we are fully staffed and fully established, we will reevaluate any capacity and identify any additional workloads that can be brought in
2. First year accomplishments
- a. Staffing
    - i. HART became operational in 2023, with approximately 150 SCOPS employees, who were reassigned to HART on the onset of its operations and having come from some of the other existing service centers
    - ii. Hiring and onboarding new employees was and continues to be a priority
    - iii. HART reached its 60-85% staffing goal for fiscal year (FY) 2023
    - iv. In its first year, HART fully onboarded 379 employees of the 481 allocated positions, with an additional 34 awaiting start dates
      - 1. This brings our staffing level to 86%. The remaining 14% are in various stages of the hiring process
    - v. We anticipate reaching our FY24 goal of being 95-98% staffed before the end of this FY and HART will likely achieve this goal before the deadline

b. Training

- i. 322 employees have completed training related to HART operations, including 251 officers. This includes those permanently assigned to HART, as well as those temporarily detailed to HART in the January-February 2023 timeframe to assist with workload before new employees were onboarded
- ii. In addition to form type training, other applicable, specialized training may include (but is not limited to):
  1. Victimization awareness;
  2. Understanding dynamics of domestic violence;
  3. Special confidentiality protections;
  4. Secondary trauma;
  5. Statutory/regulatory eligibility requirements
- iii. While officers may be specially trained to adjudicate, it may take several months [...] to become proficient [*ASISTA Note: The speaker's audio cut out during this statement so it is incomplete and may not accurately reflect what the speaker intended to say.*]
- iv. Many of the initial HART employees were reassigned to HART, due to their knowledge and expertise in the form types adjudicated by HART. They are not only adjudicating, but helping coach, train, and mentor a large number of employees who are either new to USCIS or to HART Service Center form types
- v. BASIC Academy
  1. In addition to form-type training, officers must pass BASIC training within first year of employment
  2. BASIC Academy is a 27-day course to help new officers understand their roles and responsibilities adjudicating benefit applications and petitions
    - a. The BASIC curriculum covers public service, immigration law, customer service, fraud and national security, and other important topics
  3. 65 HART Service Center officers have attended USCIS BASIC Academy or are currently attending BASIC
    - a. 53 additional officers are scheduled to attend in the next several weeks (the slide says "months" but most will be in weeks)

3. Processing times

# First Year Accomplishments

## Processing Times



| Form         | January 2023 Processing Time | January 2024 Processing Time |
|--------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| I-360, VAWA  | 32.5 months                  | 37 months                    |
| I-601A       | 39.9 months                  | 43.5 months                  |
| I-730, FTJ-A | 36.8 months                  | 29 months                    |
| I-918 BFD    | 59.5 months                  | 64.5 months                  |

Find historical processing time data by form type and fiscal year on our website at [uscis.gov/processing-times/historic-pt](https://uscis.gov/processing-times/historic-pt)

*ASISTA Note: Larger versions of the graphics can be found in the [slides](#) USCIS shared.*

- a. The amount of time to complete 80% of adjudicated cases over the last 6 months – processing times are defined as the number of days or months that elapse between the date USCIS receives the application/petition/request and the date USCIS completes the application/petition/request, that is approves or denies it, in a given 6-month period
  - b. When we introduced HART Service Center last year, we did caution stakeholders that we didn't anticipate improvement in processing times in our first year because our resources were focused on hiring and training, while also working pending cases. We also shared the possibility that processing times would slip before got they better because the resources used to onboard and train employees are the same who adjudicate and support adjudicative functions
    - i. This impact on processing times was necessary to build a strong foundation for the future
  - c. While foundation-building was our main focus, we did make modest improvements in the I-730 Follow-to-Join Asylee workload
  - d. Processing times are just one part in measuring adjudicative progress
4. Completions

# First Year Accomplishments

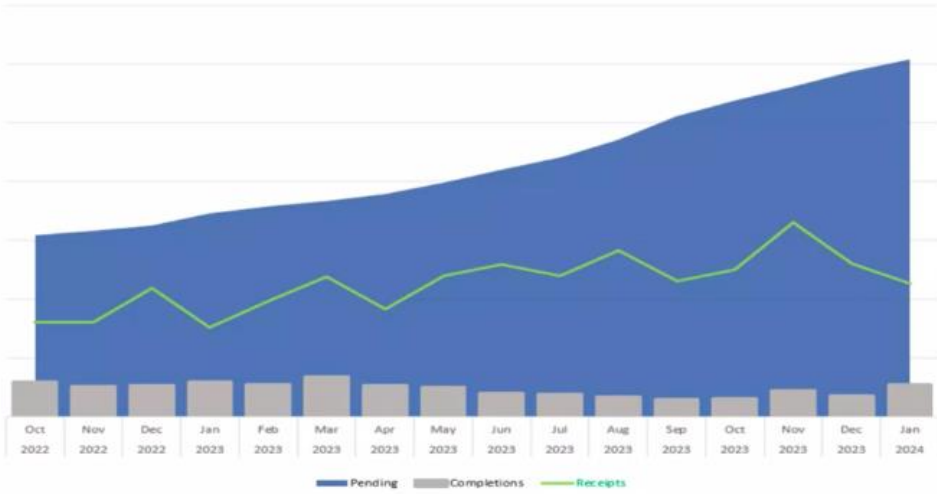


## Completions

| Form Type        | Completions FY 2023 | Completions FY24 through January 2024 |
|------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------|
| I-360 VAWA       | 11,663              | 3,252                                 |
| I-601A           | 9,080               | 12,880                                |
| I-730 FTJ-Asylee | 15,605              | 1,260                                 |
| I-918 BFD        | 31,833              | 37,363                                |
| <b>Total</b>     | <b>68,181</b>       | <b>54,755</b>                         |

- a. While staffing and training were priorities in our first year, we are already seeing promising preliminary results in terms of adjudication completions. We are on track to exceed or have already exceeded our adjudicative completions for FY23
  - b. We anticipate continued success in this regard as we continue to onboard/train additional staff for the foreseeable future
5. Monthly trends graphics
- a. Something new we'd like to share – the graphics provide additional context to the work being done at HART. The graphic identifies our pending, receipt, and completions data in monthly increments for FY23 and FY24, up to Jan 2024
  - b. VAWA Trends

## I-360 VAWA Monthly Trends



- i. Admittedly, we have not made much progress here yet. But remember, our focus was on onboarding/training in the first year and we also saw an increase in filings in this workload
  - 1. We were not expecting adjudicative progress in this workload until we trained officers in making proficiency during the first year in this highly specialized workload. This is one of those workloads that requires additional training mentioned earlier on dynamics of DV, special confidentiality protections, vicarious trauma, and statutory/regulatory requirements
  - 2. However, some good news on this front – many of our more recent employees to onboard/train have been assigned to I-360 VAWA. We trained 8 officers on this form type just in February. Between now and June, we expect to onboard 18 or so officers who will be assigned to and trained on the I-360 VAWA workload. So we should begin to see progress in this workload as FY24 continues
- c. I-601A Trends

## I-601A Monthly Trends



- i. Significant portion of officers are trained on this workload. This is where we are really beginning to see results of our efforts
- ii. Due to scanning efforts, this workload is mostly electronic. This allowed us to train Form I-730 officers on I-601A workload. Now those officers can adjudicate I-601As when I-730 work is minimal
- iii. This shows our ability to steadily increase the number of completions and allowed HART to start chipping away at backlog
- iv. The red circle on the graph indicates backlog for recent months

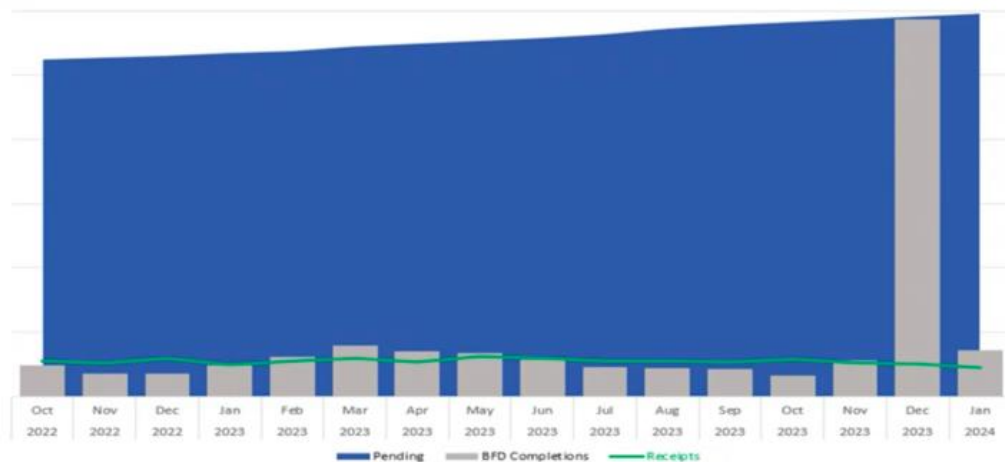
1. We have decreased it a little bit each month, since September 2023
2. As officers become more experienced and proficient, we will continue building on this progress and we anticipate seeing more of these results in FY2024

d. I- 730 Trends

- i. No graphic provided because it is somewhat complex from operational perspective because multiple USCIS directorates share this workload/adjudicate this form
- ii. The Texas Service Center (TSC) intakes all Form I-730s on behalf of the Agency, but HART only adjudicates the I-730 Follow-to-Join Asylee (FTJ-A) workload
- iii. HART and TSC expend numerous hours completing upfront work for other I-730 workloads, prepping other Form I-730 categories before they are shipped elsewhere for adjudication
  1. HART enters data for I-730 Follow-to-Join Refugee workload and immediately shifts those to the Refugee, Asylum and International Operations Directorate (RAIO)
  2. Also preprocesses domestic FTJ-A cases before shipping them to the Field Office Directorate (FOD)
- iv. Successful backlog reduction initiative last summer reduced HART's pending over 90-day backlog and allowed us to add resources to the Form I-601A workload
  1. Initiative was where HART properly identified pending cases within HART's purview to adjudicate and greatly reduced backlog of FTJ-A cases pending over 90 days
    - a. After that, there were only about 500 adjudication-ready cases for HART's I-730 officers so created the opportunity to cross-train them in I-601As. This flexibility comes from working in an electronic environment and allows us to better shift and address both of those workloads

e. I-918 BFD Trends

# I-918 Bona Fide Determination Monthly Trends



- i. As with I-601As, BFD is another workload where HART is gaining some traction
- ii. We employ the efficiencies we talked about that allow us to review more petitions and we expect trend will continue through FY24
- iii. Because the BFD is not a final adjudicative action, it doesn't affect or reduce our pending cases so you won't see a dip there. Only I-918 approvals can affect pending case numbers and we are limited by statute to 10,000 I-918 principals each fiscal year
- iv. Improvements in BFD completions helps stabilize pending petitioners by providing them with work authorization and deferred action while they await final adjudication

*ASISTA Note: USCIS did not address the marked increase in BFD adjudications in December 2023, that has since returned to pre-December 2023 adjudication levels, per their graphic.*

## 6. First Year Accomplishments

### a. Outreach

- i. Being transparent internally with employees, as well as externally with stakeholders, is critical to our success
- ii. Supported over two dozen internal and external engagements over the past year that were related to the stand-up of the HART Service Center
  1. This includes quarterly national engagements and it has allowed us to reach approximately 1500 individuals
  2. The engagements discussed don't include the T/U/VAWA engagements that HART also supports



- iii. We will continue to support HART national engagements and other opportunities
  - 1. We are looking forward to participating in a joint webinar coming up on April 30th with the USCIS Ombudsman, that will be to celebrate HART's 1-year anniversary
- iv. Continue to build our culture to ensure a quality workplace
  - 1. Building internal identity and culture – town halls & newsletters regularly reinforce agency focus on promoting adjudicative efficiency and delivering on our humanitarian mission
  - 2. HART employees created and voted on their own HART Service Center logo, displayed in team meetings and engagements (winning logo in background of this presentation)

7. Resources

- a. Find historical processing time data by form type and fiscal year at: <https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/historic-pt>
- b. Service Center Operations: <https://www.uscis.gov/about-us/organization/directorates-and-program-offices/service-center-operations-directorate>
- c. Inquiry process: <https://www.uscis.gov/about-us/contact-us>
- d. Check case status: <https://egov.uscis.gov/>
- e. Lockbox and Service Center Filing Location Updates: <https://www.uscis.gov/forms/lockbox-and-service-center-filing-location-updates>

- 8. We will try to address questions through FAQs or in future engagements

*ASISTA Note: USCIS did not respond to any questions during the engagement.*