



FY2026 FINAL-QUARTER FOIA FINDINGS

Closing inventory and USCIS disclosure accountability

Reporting Period: July 1–September 30, 2026 | Evidence compilation: October 18, 2026

Version 1.1, updated October 2026 to further protect applicant privacy.

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Executive Summary

Our review identifies substantial full and partial withholding in the USCIS FOIA determinations available for analysis. Some records disclose the adjudicative reason and supervisory review; others show favorable findings followed by adverse notices without access to the intervening adopted reasoning. The most significant issue is whether the final decision, supervisory history and notice can be reconciled from the records released.

Introduction, Purpose, and Scope

Background and Purpose

This report presents the findings of an independent examination of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) refugee adjudication records obtained through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), focusing on South African applicants seeking admission to the United States under the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP).

Prepared by The Bridge to Liberty Inc., through its Strategic Intelligence and Analysis Department and the Incredible Ineligibles Coalition (IIC), this report forms part of our continuing examination of the adjudication, denial notification, and disclosure practices affecting these applicants.

The investigation was initiated in response to growing concerns among applicants who, following extensive refugee interviews, received generic Notices of Ineligibility without an explanation of the specific factual circumstances, statutory grounds, or adjudicative reasoning underlying their denials.

For many applicants, these notifications arrived months after adverse decisions had already been recorded internally by USCIS. When applicants subsequently exercised their rights under FOIA to obtain their immigration records and understand the reasons for their denials, many encountered extensive redactions that continued to obscure the very information they were seeking.

These circumstances raised questions extending beyond individual refugee determinations to the consistency, transparency, and accountability of the adjudication process itself.

Objectives of the Investigation

The primary purpose of this investigation is to examine whether the available USCIS records demonstrate that refugee eligibility determinations were reached through the consistent application of established statutory requirements, evidentiary standards, supervisory procedures, and adjudication guidance.



Particular attention has been given to the relationship between interviewing officers' recorded findings, supervisory and higher-level reviews, subsequent changes in recommendations or outcomes, and the final decisions communicated to applicants.

The investigation also examines recurring lines of interview questioning, including political affiliation, lawful community protection activities, historical criminal conduct, alleged inadmissibility, foreign nationality, and potential misunderstandings arising from language or unfamiliarity with South African circumstances.

A further objective is to evaluate whether applicants who may qualify for statutory exceptions, waivers of inadmissibility, or corrections to material errors have access to practical and identifiable procedures through which those matters can be addressed.

Our examination is guided by a central question:

Can USCIS substantiate its adverse refugee determinations through the documented factual findings, applicable law, supervisory review, and decision-making standards established by the agency itself?

Scope and Evidence Base

This report covers the fourth quarter of Fiscal Year 2026, from July 1 through September 30, 2026, with the supporting evidence compiled through October 18, 2026. Earlier adjudication records and events have been examined where necessary to establish the chronology and circumstances of decisions communicated during the reporting period.

The review draws upon FOIA records and supporting documentation voluntarily provided for examination, including USCIS determination letters, Refugee Application Assessments, interview notes, supervisory findings, Notices of Ineligibility, case-status records, correspondence, and related supporting materials.

The submitted records were examined to identify document duplication, distinguish agency-reported disclosure figures from the physical records supplied, and assess the legal and factual reasoning accessible within the released material.

Where disclosure allocations could be verified from USCIS determination letters, those figures form the basis of the report's statistical analysis. Where information was missing, withheld, or could not be independently established, those limitations are identified rather than replaced with assumptions.

Individual applicants and case records have been anonymized. The underlying source documents and corresponding case reviews remain available within our controlled records for verification and further examination.

Nature and Limitations of the Findings

This investigation does not presume that every refugee denial was incorrect, that every adverse adjudication involved procedural misconduct, or that an unfavorable outcome automatically demonstrates the improper exercise of discretion.

Its purpose is to distinguish what USCIS actually documented from what remains undisclosed or unexplained, and to identify circumstances in which the available record raises substantive questions concerning the application of law, interpretation of evidence, supervisory accountability, or procedural fairness.



Equally, the absence of disclosed reasoning cannot be treated as confirmation that the underlying adjudication was properly conducted.

The central concern is not simply that applicants were denied refugee protection. It is whether the records demonstrate that those decisions were legally supported, properly reviewed, accurately communicated, and reached through the standards USCIS is responsible for applying.

The findings presented in this report are intended to provide an evidence-based foundation for informed examination of these practices and the institutional accountability questions arising from them.

Submitted material — reconciled controlling count

Intake category	Count
Files submitted	82
Exact duplicate PDF submissions removed	(2)
Distinct FOIA submitted files	80
Agency determinations with verified disclosure allocations	50

The controlling submission figure is 80. This is the number of non-identical FOIA-related files received, not a certified count of distinct refugee applicants or independent USCIS decisions. The underlying PDFs include combined adult records, supporting letters and alternate versions. We do not add those as new decisions or discard them from the intake count.

Agency-reported page dispositions

USCIS category	Pages	Share of 7,855
Released in full	2,939	37.4%
Released in part / partially redacted	1,974	25.1%
Withheld in full	2,942	37.5%
TOTAL — verified allocations	7,855	100.0%

The agency categories reconcile exactly across 50 distinct determinations ($2,939 + 1,974 + 2,942 = 7,855$). Partial or full withholding affects 4,916 positions (62.6%) in this verified subset. Figures for 16 records have not been independently established; no zeros or estimated redaction percentages are assigned to them.

Material findings requiring accountability

1 | DOCUMENTED CHANGES IN ADJUDICATIVE OUTCOME

Six selected case sequences contain favorable assessments, recommendations or approvals followed by later adverse outcomes. Three contain explicit overturn language. In one instance, the record discloses a reasoned supervisory disagreement concerning discretion; in two unrelated cases, the records contain overturned approvals



with the decisive review explanation withheld. Three cases also require the intervening decision and status history to be reconciled. These are documented examples, not an extrapolated program-wide reversal rate.

Recorded approval recommendations, conditional eligibility notices, holds, waivers and interim system statuses are not necessarily final authorization to travel or admission. Where an approval or concurrence preceded a later denial (evidenced in at least five cases), the relevant question is what intervening checks, referrals, authorized review actions or adopted findings changed the result. In at least two cases, an express overturn is visible, but the substantive explanation is withheld. Neither an earlier favorable assessment nor a later generic notice independently supplies the intervening decision history.

2 | DENIAL TIMING AND NOTICE CHRONOLOGY

Selected records show material intervals between recorded adverse events and later dated generic notices: 202 days in one submission; 105 days in another; and 120 days in a further example. One submission records a 280-day interval from a supervisory signature to a later notice, but that signature is not necessarily the denial date. These intervals reach the dated notice, not independently verified delivery.

Earlier detailed Notices of Ineligibility (NOIs) have been found in FOIA case documents that were generated and retained in A-files but not delivered to applicants. That internal generation must be distinguished from the later generic one-line notices actually issued to applicants. The earlier detailed NOIs and their dispatch histories require underlying document and service verification before a cohort-wide conclusion is published.

The Request for Review (RFR) procedure was discontinued effective April 23, 2026, exactly two calendar months before the June 23, 2026 date recorded on the first batch of generic Notices of Ineligibility (NOIs). These notices were subsequently dispatched to applicants on June 30, 2026, informing them that they had been found ineligible for continued processing for admission to the United States as refugees under the program established pursuant to President Donald J. Trump's Executive Order 14204 of February 7, 2025, Addressing Egregious Actions of the Republic of South Africa. This was the first of 3 recorded "waves" of mass notifications. Afterward, NOIs were dispatched individually on a case-by-case basis, as needed.

The chronology is particularly significant: by the time these applicants were formally notified of their ineligibility, the procedure through which they could previously have requested review of their refugee denials had already been discontinued for more than two months even though, in some instances, adjudicating officers explicitly recorded that RFRs could be approved or denied if pursued by the applicant.

A complete chronology must distinguish an adjudication or assessment date from notice preparation, internal generation, approval for issuance, dispatch and actual receipt. An A-file copy or export timestamp does not on its own prove that an earlier detailed NOI was approved for service or delivered. Existing native notice versions, service records and event logs are the records needed to test that chain.

FOIA DISCLOSURES THAT PREVENT MEANINGFUL EXAMINATION

For the 50 verified allocations, 2,942 positions were withheld in full and 1,974 partially released. In one allocation, 204 of 268 agency positions were fully withheld. In other productions, a comparatively small volume of fully withheld pages obscured the decisive legal or supervisory explanation by agency redaction. A page-based percentage does not measure how much relevant reasoning remains inaccessible, and the specific exemptions and



segregability must be assessed case by case.

The withholding pattern also varies by the type of material concealed. In some family-related productions, large portions were withheld under the privacy exemption (Exemption 6), alongside separate law-enforcement withholdings (Exemption 7(E)). Productions for members of the same household can also show different disclosure patterns. These differences justify attention to the requester, any valid consent, the exemptions invoked, and whether reasonably segregable material could have been released.

A fully withheld placeholder sheet proves only that a position is represented in the document; it does not reveal the underlying page. Conversely, partial-release totals say nothing about how much decisive reasoning survives on a page. Black marks or masking present before USCIS FOIA processing must also be distinguished from agency withholdings. The adequacy of the explanation must therefore be assessed from what is actually readable, not from page percentages alone.

OFFICER DISCRETION AND SUPERVISORY ACCOUNTABILITY

The records raise particular questions about the evidence supporting an individual officer's assessment, the supervisor's response, and any later authorized changes. The case-specific chain should show the adopted ground, the role and date of approval or overturn, the consideration of favorable evidence and the final notice history. Where explanatory passages remain withheld, neither legality nor impropriety can be conclusively determined from the notice alone.

Particular attention is warranted where exported records retain a 'Pending Decision' value or blank decision fields alongside other adverse case indicators. Such fields may reflect different data functions, historic snapshots or incomplete extracts; they do not by themselves prove that a denial is invalid or an application remains pending. Original assessment versions, their modification and adoption history, disposition and reason codes, reviewer roles, and the supporting evidence are needed to identify the operative decision.

What the records actually reveal about denial reasoning

In much of the FOIA material reviewed, the final adopted adjudication is absent from the released pages or its essential legal and factual explanation is redacted. The records that do disclose officer, supervisory or higher-level reasoning are therefore particularly instructive. They show that adverse outcomes can arise for materially different reasons, even where an interviewing officer has accepted the persecution claim. These illustrations describe findings actually recorded by USCIS, not grounds inferred from the questions asked during an interview.

One case involves an applicant whom the interviewing officer found to have a well-founded fear of persecution and to be otherwise admissible. The officer weighed past arrests that did not lead to convictions, the time that had passed and the applicant's explanations, and recommended approval in the exercise of discretion. A supervisor accepted the persecution finding but weighed the same history more heavily, treating it as a public-safety concern. The recommendation was overturned on discretionary grounds, with higher-level concurrence. Here the actual reasons are visible: the disagreement concerned the weight given to past conduct, not the persecution claim itself. The question is whether that discretionary balance was adequately supported, particularly where arrests did not result in convictions. (Source case F001.)



In another case, the officer accepted the persecution findings but recorded a controlled-substance inadmissibility ground and did not recommend a waiver. The reasoning relied partly on allegations that did not concern the applicant directly. The supervisor agreed and applied a heightened hardship standard. This raises a testable issue: what evidence connects those allegations to the applicant's own conduct, and what legal standard properly governed the waiver decision? (Source case F058.)

In a further record, a signed supervisory update shows the importance of examining the legal analysis itself. The reviewer rejected one criminal inadmissibility theory because a required legal element was not established, yet kept a separate criminal ground. This shows a substantive review in which one legal basis was discarded while another remained. The visible note does not fully identify the statutory basis for the retained conclusion, so it cannot by itself supply the complete final rationale. (Source case F071.)

Another detailed NOI retained in the source records identifies controlled-substance trafficking as the ground of inadmissibility and states that a waiver is unavailable for that ground. That reasoning is materially different from a denial involving distant experimental drug use, an unproven criminal allegation or an adverse discretionary waiver recommendation. Such distinctions explain why applicants need to know which legal ground was actually adopted. The presence of this notice in an A-file must not be confused with proof that it was dispatched to or received by the applicant. (Source case F068, pp. 6-7.)

By contrast, higher-level review records in other files document an adverse change without revealing the reason for it. One assessment bears leadership overturn language and a Director's signature following an earlier favorable status; another records supervisory overturn and Section Chief concurrence while the substantive explanation is withheld. The higher-level action is evident, but its legal and factual justification is not accessible in the disclosed pages. We should not invent a ground to fill that gap. The necessary comparison is between the interviewing officer's original recommendation, the intervening decision, the final adopted finding and the notice communicated to the applicant. (Sources case F018, pp. 20-23; case F014, pp. 19-20.)

Taken together, the disclosed explanations distinguish refugee eligibility from inadmissibility, discretionary denial and waiver decisions. They also demonstrate why a favorable initial finding is not equivalent to final approval and why an adverse notice is not, by itself, an explanation. Where actual reasons have been released, they can be examined against the governing law and the evidence. Where those reasons remain withheld, meaningful accountability depends on the underlying assessment versions, reviewer actions and final decision history.

Post-denial barriers to waivers, corrections and meaningful case inquiries

The records reveal a further practical obstacle: an applicant may only discover from a subsequently released A-file that USCIS considered a potentially waivable ground of inadmissibility, or identified a question capable of clarification, after the applicant-facing generic Notice of Ineligibility has given no case-specific legal ground, waiver instruction or procedure for correction. In one reviewed case, the released assessment expressly recorded a controlled-substance inadmissibility ground and stated that a waiver could be requested, yet the generic notice did not explain that possibility. No signed Form I-602 or separate waiver determination was located in the material reviewed.



USCIS itself recognizes Form I-602 as a means of seeking a waiver of certain inadmissibility grounds for an otherwise qualified refugee applicant under INA § 207(c)(3). Its published filing guidance directs an overseas applicant who has already filed Form I-590, been interviewed, been notified of inadmissibility and has an available waiver to contact the Resettlement Support Center (RSC) that prepared the case for instructions on filing Form I-602. This is a specific, RSC-dependent procedure, not an assurance that simply emailing an independent USCIS address or completing a form privately constitutes a filing. Waivers are not available for all grounds and cannot cure a failure to establish the refugee definition. [USCIS, Form I-602 and Instructions, edition 01/20/25; www.uscis.gov/i-602.]

The difficulty becomes concrete when the applicant is simultaneously instructed not to use that intermediary. In a CWS/RSC Africa Notice of Ineligibility email examined in this review, the applicant was expressly told not to contact RSC Africa/CWS or the U.S. Embassy or consulates in South Africa because those offices could not affect the USCIS finding. The same message warned that MyCase website access would expire five days after receipt. Before the denial, RSC Africa/CWS had directed applicants to use the MyCase portal for document uploads and had stopped reviewing email attachments effective March 26, 2026; it also instructed applicants to upload only documents specifically requested by RSC Africa/CWS. In other words, the communicated upload channel was time-limited while the applicant was discouraged from contacting the very service center identified in USCIS waiver-filing guidance. [CWS/RSC Africa notice dated July 20, 2026; CWS correspondence dated April 8, 2026, effective March 26, 2026; identifying details omitted.]

This is not merely an issue of restoring a forgotten password. The CWS notice describes the expiry of access after ineligibility; the accompanying no-contact instruction and restrictions on unsolicited documents create a serious practical question about how an applicant can submit a waiver request, provide a correction to an erroneous material fact, address an unresolved case-status inconsistency or obtain authoritative filing instructions. In some cases, relevant information may only become apparent after the applicant receives a FOIA response, long after the MyCase access period has passed. The general ability to request records under FOIA is not a mechanism for lodging an I-602 waiver or securing merits reconsideration.

The remaining USCIS routes require clear differentiation. USCIS discontinued Requests for Review of Form I-590 effective April 23, 2026. Its published I-590 contact-center policy provides for referral of case-specific inquiries to the responsible refugee operations function rather than a substantive answer from the contact-center agent. A referral for information, however, is not itself a waiver filing, a reopened adjudication or a correction of the authoritative case record. Similarly, an administrative appeal of a FOIA determination concerns the search for and disclosure of records, not a reversal of the refugee decision. [USCIS, archived Request for Review Tip Sheet; USCIS Policy Manual, Vol. 1, Part A, Ch. 7, Privacy and Confidentiality.]

The resulting accountability question is straightforward: when USCIS records a potentially available waiver or an issue requiring correction, which identified office can actually accept and process that submission after the applicant receives a generic denial and RSC Africa/CWS says not to contact it? How are applicants expected to learn the exact ground, obtain instructions, lodge supporting evidence, correct a material mistake or receive confirmation that their request was placed before the authorized USCIS decision-maker? The answer should not depend on an applicant guessing at an email address or mailing a form to an office that has not agreed to receive it.

This finding does not imply that every applicant is entitled to a waiver, that every denial may be reopened or that embassy staff can reconsider USCIS decisions. It identifies a documented conflict between the filing pathway



described by USCIS and the post-denial access restrictions communicated to applicants—a conflict requiring a clear, operationally usable explanation. The right question is whether a lawful procedure, where applicable, remains practically accessible to the person instructed to use it.

Trends in USCIS interview questioning — illustrative findings

The reviewed interview notes and case assessments show several recurring lines of inquiry. The examples below are drawn from identified source records and our corresponding case reviews, not from a new frequency count across all submissions. An interview question or referral does not establish an adverse legal finding: the central issue is whether the final assessment records how the answer was interpreted and whether it influenced the determination.

POLITICAL AFFILIATION, CIVIC OPPOSITION AND ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERSHIP

Questions extend beyond basic membership to an applicant's political opinions, participation, videos, group activities and apparent inconsistencies between answers. One record includes a same-day callback to clarify responses about political and organizational involvement (case F048, pp. 76–80). Another documents an organizational-affiliation issue in the context of a hold or referral, notwithstanding favorable refugee findings elsewhere in the file (case F046, pp. 40–41, 63, 65; related case F013 review). The substantive distinction is between lawful association with AfriForum, Solidarity, Freedom Front Plus or Suidlanders and any particular conduct legally attributable to the applicant. The excerpts do not independently establish that membership caused a denial.

COMMUNITY PROTECTION, POLICING, WEAPONS AND SECURITY-RELATED ROLES

Interview material examines community protection activities, private-security and correctional work, military service, weapons, and the circumstances in which force might be used. Several reviewed records explore these duties in detail. These examples raise the need to distinguish lawful community policing or official duties from individual acts involving prohibited violence or abuse; the questioning alone does not establish wrongdoing. (Cases F065, F046, F019.)

HISTORICAL DRUG USE AND THE PRECISION OF ALLEGED ADMISSIONS

Officers examine when substances were used, how often, and whether the applicant understood the legal significance of an answer. In more than one case, our internal reviews found that an earlier summary overstated what the applicant actually admitted. This matters because use, possession, trafficking, a legally sufficient criminal admission and a medical classification are distinct findings, with different legal consequences. (Cases F012, F014, F017.)

PAST CRIMINAL ALLEGATIONS, MITIGATION AND DISCRETIONARY JUDGMENTS

The records show that past arrests and alleged wrongdoing can be scrutinized even where there were no convictions. In one assessment, the interviewing officer considered the age of the incidents, the absence of convictions and the applicant's explanations, and recommended approval; a supervisor later weighed the same history more negatively (case F001). Separately, a reviewer rejected one criminal theory but kept another criminal ground (case F071). Both examples show why the record must identify the conduct actually established and the legal test applied.



POSSIBLE FOREIGN CITIZENSHIP AND ALTERNATIVES TO SOUTH AFRICAN PROTECTION

Questions examine birth outside South Africa, possible citizenship of another country, and nationality connections through relatives. A parent's foreign nationality, an unused option to register, an expired route to citizenship and citizenship actually held are not interchangeable. The reviewed examples show that foreign status was investigated; they do not establish that it was the adopted denial ground. Where material, the file should show the specific foreign-law basis and actual citizenship status rather than an assumed pathway. (Cases F045, F066.)

LANGUAGE, COMPREHENSION, CORRECTIONS AND CREDIBILITY

Some interviews were conducted without an interpreter for applicants whose first language is not English, or involved communication difficulties, compound questions, and uncertainty about which relative was being discussed. In some records, answers were formally corrected later, or a misunderstanding was explained in writing. Such corrections should be traced into the final assessment: a clarification may be consequential without proving that every inconsistency arose from mistranslation or was treated adversely. (Cases F019, F055.)

CROSS-CUTTING OBSERVATION: FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONING VERSUS ADOPTED GROUNDS

Several examples show continued questioning, callbacks, referrals or later supervisory review even after favorable findings appeared in the record. We cannot infer a denial ground merely from the emphasis of an interview or an officer's line of questioning. The common accountability issue is whether the decision chain identifies what was asked, what the applicant actually answered, how any correction or contrary evidence was treated, and which factual findings were ultimately adopted. The source references above allow targeted verification without reproducing the underlying case files in this report.

REPORT INTEGRITY AND UNRESOLVED NUMERICAL CONTROLS

The record entries contain 9,655 retained physical pages; this is not the denominator used for agency disclosure percentages. Those entries include 7,765 physical pages corresponding to 50 agency allocations and 1,890 pages in 14 entries without a verified agency allocation.

One source shows 147 physically retained record pages against 237 agency-reported responsive positions, a 90-position difference requiring the source manifest or original full production. This discrepancy is not automatically 90 missing pages.

The underlying export label in this record ends at page 247, although the supplied record range is shorter. That mismatch should be checked against the original production manifest, version history and any separately delivered files or omitted placeholder sheets before attributing a cause. It has not been counted as a verified volume of missing record pages.

Records needed to resolve the outstanding questions

The adjudication chain requires the original interviewing officer's findings and recommendation, every subsequent supervisory or leadership review, the adopted factual and legal ground, evidence supporting or contradicting it, relevant holds or referrals, and the dated action that made the result operative. The corresponding notice chain requires original notice versions and records of drafting, approval, generation, authorization, dispatch and delivery.



The disclosure chain requires examination of the original FOIA request scope, offices and repositories searched, search cut-off, responsive categories located, withheld, referred or not maintained, and the native exports or manifests supporting the production. Privacy and law-enforcement exemptions must be assessed with segregability in mind. A FOIA request seeks existing records; it does not require USCIS to issue a fresh merits decision or create a new explanation.

These questions can be measured against USCIS RAIO decision-making guidance regarding reasoned assessments and supervisory review and against FOIA's statutory exemption and segregability requirements. The original anonymized F-series records, supporting case reviews and determination letters remain the evidence base; this closing report does not replace them with case-by-case summaries.

Closing assessment

The verified records establish substantial full and partial withholding, several specific favorable-to-adverse decision sequences, and selected lengthy notice intervals. The accountability question is whether USCIS's existing adjudication assessments, supervisory and leadership reviews, adopted findings, and notice histories adequately connect the evidence to the ultimate outcome.

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