

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Office of the Director
Camp Springs, MD 20588-0009



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

January 13, 2026

DECISION MEMORANDUM

TO: Joseph B. Edlow
Director

FROM: Nathan Stiefel
Deputy Chief, Office of Policy and Strategy

NATHANIEL I STIEFEL
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NATHANIEL I STIEFEL
Date: 2026.01.13
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SUBJECT: **Decision on Lifting Hold for Operation PARRIS**

Purpose: To request your approval to lift the adjudicative hold for benefit requests processed through Operation PARRIS (Post-Admission Refugee Reverification and Integrity Strengthening).

Background or Context: On December 1, 2025, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) issued Memorandum *Hold and Review of all Pending Asylum Applications and all USCIS Benefit Applications Filed by Aliens from High-Risk Countries*.¹ This memorandum requires that any requests to lift the hold due to litigation or other extraordinary circumstances must be coordinated with the Office of Policy and Strategy (OP&S) and receive approval from the USCIS Director or Deputy Director. In light of identified concerns and the threat to the American people, the memorandum placed an adjudicative hold on all pending Form I-589 (Application for Asylum and for Withholding of Removal) and a hold on all pending benefit requests for aliens from countries listed in Presidential Proclamation (PP) 10949, *Restricting the Entry of Foreign Nationals To Protect the United States From Foreign Terrorists and Other National Security and Public Safety Threats*, pending a comprehensive review, regardless of entry. USCIS also placed an adjudicative hold on cases related to aliens from high-risk countries of concern who entered the United States on or after January 20, 2021, so USCIS can conduct comprehensive a rereviews, as well as potential interviews and reinterviews.

On January 1, 2026, the Department of Homeland Security launched Operation PARRIS in Minnesota, a sweeping initiative reexamining thousands of refugee cases through new background checks and intensive verification of refugee claims. The initial focus is on

¹ USCIS issued a public-facing version on December 2, 2025. See Policy Memorandum, *Hold and Review of all Pending Asylum Applications and all USCIS Benefit Applications Filed by Aliens from High-Risk Countries*, December 2, 2025 ([PM-602-0192](#)).

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Minnesota's 5,600 refugees who have not yet been given lawful permanent resident status. USCIS' newly established Vetting Center is leading Operation PARRIS, with adjudicators conducting thorough background checks, reinterviews, and merit reviews of refugee claims.

Discussion: Following a comprehensive review of the vetting process and procedures processed through Operation PARRIS, OP&S has determined that the safeguards in place are sufficient to ensure compliance with the priorities outlined in the memorandum, including the protection of national security and public safety. Specifically:

1. **Rigorous Screening Protocols:** The vetting process for Operation PARRIS includes thorough screening against the Terrorist Screening Dataset (TSDS) and other relevant national security and law enforcement databases. These protocols ensure that any derogatory information or grounds of inadmissibility, deportability, national security, public safety, and ineligibility are identified and addressed.
2. **National Security and Public Safety Compliance:** Applications adjudicated under Operation PARRIS are subject to individualized assessments to ensure compliance with sections 212(a)(3)(A), (B), or (F), or 237(a)(4)(A) or (B) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). This process ensures that applicants do not pose a current threat to national security or public safety.
3. **Identity Verification:** The vetting process for Operation PARRIS includes robust identity verification measures consistent with the requirements outlined in PP 10949 and USCIS Policy Manual guidelines.
4. **Documentation:** All findings and assessments related to Operation PARRIS are documented in accordance with established protocols to support adjudicatory decisions and any subsequent actions.

The USCIS Vetting Center is seeking this exemption based on extraordinary circumstances because they are uniquely placed to conduct extensive background and security checks with the focus of rigorous screening protocols as required by PP 10949 and 10998. In Operation PARRIS, the USCIS Vetting Center is extensively coordinating with law enforcement personnel to prioritize any cases with identified national security and public safety indicators. Therefore, adjudications made by Operation PARRIS are highly focused on protecting the Homeland and ensuring all public safety and national security threats are appropriately addressed.

Timeliness: As soon as possible.

Implementation Plan: USCIS will immediately coordinate with adjudicating personnel in relevant program offices and directorates to lift the hold for benefit requests with Operation PARRIS. Cases with identified national security, public safety, or fraud-related derogatory information still require the adjudicative directorate or program office to coordinate with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), in accordance with current policies and procedures before final adjudication. Officers must follow established policies to ensure proper screening and vetting and that any derogatory information is thoroughly evaluated and appropriately resolved.

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Recommendation: In consultation with Office of the Chief Counsel, the Fraud Detection and National Security Directorate, and the USCIS Vetting Center, OP&S recommends that you approve lifting the hold on benefit requests processed through Operation PARRIS.

Approve/date JOSEPH B EDLOW Digitally signed by JOSEPH B EDLOW
Date: 2026.01.15 15:29:35 -05'00' Disapprove/Date _____

Modify/date _____ Needs discussion/date _____