The Department of Homeland Security has proposed a new fee rule that would raise the cost of several immigration applications, including the naturalisation process for lawful permanent residents seeking US citizenship. The proposal sits within a broader effort to adjust USCIS filing fees and funding, and it has real, immediate consequences for timing, budgeting, and strategy for eligible applicants.

Naturalisation is already a milestone that requires planning and careful preparation. A proposed fee increase adds a very practical layer to that planning. Cost is not the only factor in deciding when to file, of course, but it can become the deciding factor for families applying together, older applicants on fixed income, and applicants who need extra filings around the same time, like replacement green cards or removal of conditions.

What DHS is proposing, in plain terms

DHS, through USCIS, periodically reviews filing fees and publishes proposed rules that adjust them. When USCIS proposes higher fees for naturalisation, it is usually framed as a funding measure tied to processing operations, staffing, technology, and the agency's overall workload.

The key point is this. A proposed rule is not automatically the final rule.

It is a public proposal. It triggers a notice and comment period. The government reviews comments, may revise the final

numbers or structure, and then publishes a final rule with an effective date. The effective date matters because in most fee rule changes, cases postmarked or filed online on or after that date must include the new fees. Cases filed before that date generally proceed under the old fee schedule, as long as the submission is properly filed and accepted.

Naturalisation fees. What is typically included

A naturalisation application is generally filed on Form N-400. The overall cost usually includes a filing fee and, in many cases, a biometrics-related charge or background check cost, depending on the specific fee schedule in effect at the time.

Even when a fee schedule describes separate line items, what matters in practice is the total amount required for a properly filed N-400. Submitting the wrong amount is one of the simplest ways a case can be rejected at intake, which can create delays and sometimes push a filing past a deadline that was being targeted.

A proposed increase usually means a higher base fee, a restructuring of how biometrics costs are treated, or both. It can also affect related filings that come up during the citizenship path, such as:

- Form N-565 for replacement of a naturalisation certificate, if one is lost or damaged later
- Form I-90 for green card renewal or replacement before naturalisation, if the card is expiring and travel or employment verification is an issue

- Form I-751 or I-829, if removing conditions is still pending and naturalisation timing is being evaluated carefully

Fee changes do not happen in isolation. Families often have multiple filings in play.

Timing issues. Filing before an effective date is not always simple

When a fee increase is proposed, a common response is to file quickly. That may be appropriate in many cases, but it is not always the right move. Naturalisation should be filed when the applicant is eligible and the case can be supported cleanly.

Rushing an N-400 can create risk. Common problem areas include:

- Absences from the United States that may interrupt continuous residence
- Unresolved tax filing issues, including incorrect filing status or missing returns
- Selective Service registration issues, where applicable
- Criminal arrests or charges, even if dismissed or expunged, which may require certified records and careful legal analysis
- Prior immigration history problems, including misrepresentation concerns, old removal orders, or prior petitions containing inaccuracies
- Good moral character issues, including unpaid child support, probation, or certain patterns of conduct

A poorly prepared filing is not “saved” by beating a fee deadline. A denial is far more expensive than the difference between

old and new fees, especially when it creates future immigration complications.

Fee waivers and fee reductions. What may be impacted

Naturalisation has historically offered certain relief options for qualifying applicants, including fee waivers and reduced fees depending on income and public benefit criteria. Any proposed fee rule should be read carefully for how it treats those programs.

Some fee rules attempt to limit fee waivers, tighten eligibility, or change the form requirements for requesting them. Others preserve them but adjust thresholds or procedures. The effect can be significant for:

- Seniors with limited income
- Applicants with disabilities
- Applicants receiving means tested public benefits
- Applicants supporting large households on modest wages

If DHS is proposing a higher N-400 fee, it is equally important to track whether the proposal changes the availability of fee waivers or reductions. Eligibility for a fee waiver is fact specific. It is not enough to generally assume it will apply.

How this can affect families applying together

Naturalisation is often planned as a coordinated family step. One spouse files first, then the other. Or both file together. Sometimes parents file and later help eligible children with derived or acquired citizenship questions, or with their own naturalisation timelines.

If the N-400 fee increases, a two applicant household may need to budget thousands of dollars more, depending on the final rule. That can lead to staggered filings, which can be fine, but should be planned with an eye on eligibility dates and travel schedules.

It also intersects with other major filings, like:

- Adjustment of status filings for a spouse or child
- Consular processing support
- Removal of conditions
- Requests for evidence that require certified documents and translations

A fee increase can shift the sequence of filings. In some cases, it may make sense to address document cleanup first, then file, even if it means paying the new fee. In other cases, filing earlier may be the better choice if eligibility is clear and the

case is straightforward.

Planning considerations that matter more than the fee

A proposed fee increase naturally draws attention, but the best citizenship strategy still depends on the underlying record. Before filing an N-400, it is usually wise to confirm, in a methodical way:

- The earliest filing date based on the three year rule (marriage to a US citizen) or five year rule, including the 90 day early filing window where applicable
- Continuous residence and physical presence calculations, especially for applicants who travel frequently
- Whether any trip triggers the six month or one year issues that can complicate continuous residence
- Whether there are pending immigration matters that should be resolved first, such as I-751 issues
- Whether name change is desired and how that will affect interview and oath logistics
- Whether documentation is ready, including tax transcripts, marriage and divorce records, court dispositions, and selective service proof

Naturalisation is a legal filing with long term consequences. It deserves a careful review even when the case appears simple.

A practical takeaway for naturalisation planning

If the proposal becomes final, the cost of becoming a US citizen could increase meaningfully. That makes early case evaluation more important, not less. A well prepared N-400 that is filed at the right time, with accurate eligibility analysis and complete documentation, is the strongest way to avoid delays, rejections, and unnecessary exposure.

For applicants who are already eligible and have a clean case history, filing before a final rule's effective date may be a sensible financial decision. For applicants with legal complications, travel issues, or record concerns, it may be better to prioritize correct filing over fast filing, even if it means paying a higher fee later.

As DHS moves the proposal forward, naturalisation applicants should expect more clarity once a final rule and effective date are published. Until then, the focus should remain on eligibility, documentation, and risk management, with fees treated as one part of a larger filing strategy.