

## Texas Rep. Touts Funding For 25 New Immigration Judges

Share us on: By Daniel Siegal

Law360, Los Angeles (May 26, 2016, 6:43 PM ET) -- Texas Democratic Rep. Henry Cuellar on Wednesday announced that he had secured funding for 25 new immigration judges in a fiscal year 2017 appropriations bill that just passed out of committee, as immigration courts face a massive backlog that the Executive Office for Immigration Review</agencies/executive-office-for-immigration-review> blames on a judge shortage.

Cuellar, who represents Texas' 28th congressional district, which covers a strip of south Texas that ends at the U.S.-Mexico border, announced that he had included several provisions intended to help the nation's immigration courts in the Fiscal Year 2017 Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, which was passed out of the full U.S. House Appropriation Committee on Wednesday.

The provisions that Cuellar secured include funding for 25 new immigration judge teams, \$1.7 million to upgrade the EOIR's technology systems and \$5.7 million for additional court space, according to an excerpt of the bill provided by the congressman's office. Currently, there is funding for 374 judges, according to Cuellar's announcement.

"As the member of Congress for a stretch of the U.S.-Mexico border, I pay close attention to the way our government handles immigration cases," Cuellar said in a statement. "For years I have been concerned about the backlog of immigration cases nearing half a million as a result of insufficient resources to handle them all. I have turned my attention to the underlying causes of delays in our immigration system so that we can properly address this pressing issue."

Cuellar's additions to the funding bill also included language requiring the EOIR to submit a report outlining how it is using its court space and how it plans to acquire more space, and language directing the EOIR to set a goal that by end of the fiscal year 2017, immigration cases with detained defendants will be pending for no more than 60 days on median, and cases with nondetained defendants will be pending for no more than a year, on median.

Currently, the median length for resolving a case with a detained defendant is 71 days, and the median length for resolving a case with a nondetained defendant is almost two years, according to the announcement.

In December<<http://www.law360.com/articles/731673/eoir-director-blames-judge-shortage-for-record-backlog>>, Juan Osuna, the director of the EOIR, told lawmakers that the massive immigration court backlog is largely due to a shortage of judges.

Osuna said during a House Judiciary subcommittee hearing that not having enough judges over the last few years has been the "single biggest reason" for the record-breaking 450,000 cases currently pending in immigration courts.

The EOIR, which is the U.S. Department of Justice</agencies/u-s-department-of-justice> unit that oversees the country's immigration courts, lost a swath of judges from 2011 to 2014, according to Osuna. The losses came while budget cuts were happening, and the agency couldn't replace those judges, he added.

--Additional reporting by Allissa Wickham. Editing by Stephen Berg.  
Related Articles