



ADMINISTRATIVE CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED STATES

Updates in Federal Agency Adjudication

May 2023

ACUS is an independent federal agency within the executive branch that develops recommendations to improve administrative processes, including adjudication, and arranges for the interchange of information to carry out its mission. The ACUS Office of the Chairman issues monthly *Updates* to share adjudication-related developments with agencies, Congress, and the public. For additional resources, visit www.acus.gov/adjudication.

This resource is for informational purposes only. Except as noted, these updates do not represent the position of ACUS or the federal government. New developments, feedback, and corrections are welcome at info@acus.gov.

IN THIS ISSUE

Administrative Review
Congressional Affairs
Management and Operations
Procedural Rules
Representation
Technology
Transparency

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW

[BVA Priority Recommendation: Appeals Reform](#) (GAO, May 30). The Government Accountability Office issued an open letter to the Department of Veterans Affairs adding 13 priority recommendations for the agency. Among the 13 recommendations was that the Secretary should clearly articulate in the appeals plan how VA will monitor and assess the new appeals process compared to the legacy process and ensure that risks associated with appeals reform are addressed.

CONGRESSIONAL AFFAIRS

[Congressional Constituent Service Inquiries](#) (ACUS). ACUS is examining how agencies receive, process, and respond to congressional inquiries made on behalf of constituents who need assistance accessing federal programs or navigating adjudicative and other similar administrative processes. The project will identify



ADMINISTRATIVE CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED STATES

best practices for agencies to promote quality, efficiency, and timeliness in agency procedures for responding to such inquiries. Among other topics, the project will address the body of law governing agency responses to congressional constituent service inquiries; the extent to which agencies have developed procedures for receiving, processing, and responding to such inquiries; and the scope, content, internal dissemination, and public availability of these procedures where adopted. Sean Kealey (Boston University) is serving as a consultant.

MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS

Improving Timeliness in Agency Adjudication (ACUS). ACUS launched a project to survey strategies—including procedural, technological, personnel, and other reforms—that agencies have used or might use to address backlogs or delays in administrative adjudication. Based on this survey, it will identify best practices to help agencies devise plans to promote timeliness in administrative adjudication, in accord with principles of fairness, accuracy, and efficiency. The project will also consider potential legislative reforms, if warranted. Jeremy Graboyes and Jennifer Selin, both of ACUS, are serving as researchers.

Identifying and Reducing Burdens in Administrative Processes (ACUS). ACUS is undertaking a project to recommend best practices, such as public engagement and data analysis, that agencies can use to identify unnecessary burdens that members of the public face when they engage with administrative programs or participate in administrative processes, including adjudication. It will also recommend strategies agencies can use to reduce unnecessary burdens, such as streamlining processes and digitizing services. Pamela Herd (Georgetown), Donald Moynihan (Georgetown), and Amy Widman (Rutgers) are serving as consultants.

User Fees (ACUS). ACUS is undertaking a project that will recommend best practices for agencies—and Congress, if warranted—to consider in designing and implementing user fees in administrative programs (including application fees and filing fees in agency adjudications). It will examine, among other topics, how Congress and agencies determine when user fees are appropriate; how agencies determine fair and reasonable user fees for specific programs; how they engage with the public in determining user fees; and how often they review their user fee programs. Erika Lietzan (Missouri Law) is serving as a consultant.

Video Hearings and Interns at the Board of Veterans' Appeals (Congress). The Veterans' Appeals Backlog Improvement Act was recently introduced in the House of Representative (H.R. 1378). If enacted, the bill would direct the Secretary



ADMINISTRATIVE CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED STATES

of Veterans Affairs to submit a report on improving access to video hearings before the Board, including recommendations regarding reimbursement for travel expenses to video hearing sites and methods to improve access to video hearings from veterans' homes. The Bill would also direct the Secretary to establish a competitive internship program for law students to gain experience with the Board and set up a pilot attorneys honors program.

PROCEDURAL RULES

[Best Practices for Adjudication Not Involving an Evidentiary Hearing \(ACUS\)](#). ACUS launched a project to examine the wide range of procedures that agencies use when adjudicating cases in programs in which there is no legally required opportunity for an evidentiary hearing. It will offer a set of broadly applicable best practices that account for the diversity of matters that agencies decide through truly informal adjudication and promote fairness, accuracy, and efficiency. Michael Asimow (UCLA, Santa Clara) is serving as consultant.

[Public Participation in Agency Adjudication \(ACUS\)](#). ACUS launched a project to identify best practices for public participation in agency adjudicative proceedings. Among other topics, the project will address circumstances in which public participation may be appropriate; options for public participation (e.g., written comments, oral presentations, intervention, amicus briefing); methods for facilitating public participation (e.g., notice, managing oral and written comments, technology use); and agencies' use of information obtained through public engagement efforts.

REPRESENTATION

[Design Patent Practitioner Bar \(USPTO, May 16\)](#). The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office issued an NPRM proposing to create a separate bar whereby those admitted would practice in design patent proceedings only.

[Expanding Admission Criteria for Registration to Practice in Patent Cases \(USPTO, May 16\)](#). The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office updated the General Requirements Bulletin for Admission to the Examination for Registration to Practice in Patent Cases to expand criteria, to encourage broader participation, and to account for new technologies and teachings.

[Assisting Parties in Federal Administrative Adjudication \(ACUS and LSC\)](#). ACUS and the Legal Services Corporation continue to host a series of virtual panel



ADMINISTRATIVE CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED STATES

discussions examining ways to improve support for parties in federal administrative adjudication. At the [second webinar](#), held May 11, legal aid attorneys shared their best practices for training staff and pro bono attorneys to assist low-income clients with applications for or appeals involving benefits, and government leaders will discuss training and professional development opportunities their agencies provide to help advocates represent their clients' interests effectively. The [third webinar](#), examining resources for self-represented parties, will take place on June 27. The first webinar, held in December, examined ways to expand access to representation. A recording is available [here](#).

[Model Rules of Representative Conduct \(ACUS\)](#). Following the adoption of [Recommendation 2021-9](#), *Regulation of Representatives in Agency Adjudicative Proceedings*, the Chair has convened a working group of public- and private-sector representatives to develop model rules of representative conduct. The model rules will help federal agencies amend or develop their own rules consistent with the best practices identified in Recommendation 2021-9.

Right to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings (Congress). Bills were recently introduced in the House ([H.R. 2697](#)) and Senate ([S. 1187](#)) that, if enacted, would establish the right to counsel, at Government expense for those who cannot afford counsel, for people facing removal.

TECHNOLOGY

[Setting the Manner of Appearance at Hearings \(SSA, May 19\)](#). The Social Security Administration issued an NPRM that would update its regulations by changing the terms “video teleconference” to “video”; changing “telephone” to “audio”; and permitting “video” and “audio” to be used as standard manners of appearance. The changes would clarify that claimants may appear for hearings remotely using private electronic devices and would allow for claimants to appear by audio if they do not object (currently only allowed in limited circumstances).

[Online Processes in Agency Adjudication \(ACUS\)](#). ACUS's Committee on Adjudication held its [second meeting](#) May 4 in a project to identify best practices for developing online processes by which participants in agency adjudications, including private parties and representatives can file forms, evidence, and briefs; view case materials and status information; receive notices and orders; and perform other common tasks required for participation in adjudication. The Committee drafted a [Recommendation](#) that will be considered by the ACUS Assembly at the



ADMINISTRATIVE CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED STATES

[79th Plenary Session](#) on June 15. The Recommendation was informed by a [report](#) by ACUS Attorney Advisor Matthew Gluth.

TRANSPARENCY

[Disclosure of Agency Legal Materials \(ACUS\)](#). A special ad hoc committee held its [fourth meeting](#) May 10 in a project to consider whether the main statutes governing disclosure of agency legal materials, including adjudicative decisions, should be amended to consolidate and harmonize their overlapping requirements, account for technological developments, correct certain statutory ambiguities and drafting errors, and address other potential problems that may be identified. If warranted, the project will recommend possible statutory reforms to provide clear standards as to what legal materials agencies must publish and where they must publish them. The objective of any amendments will be to ensure that agencies provide ready public access to important legal materials in the most efficient way possible. The committee drafted a [Recommendation](#) that will be considered by the ACUS Assembly at the [79th Plenary Session](#) on June 15. The Recommendation was informed by a [report](#) by Bernard Bell (Rutgers), Cary Coglianese (University of Pennsylvania), Michael Herz (Yeshiva), Margaret Kwoka (Ohio State), and Orly Lobel (San Diego).