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NALEO Educational Fund submits this comment in response to notices from the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) published in the Federal Register at 90 Fed. Reg. 12176 (March 14, 2025), 90 Fed. Reg. 12178 (March 14, 2025), and 90 Fed. Reg. 16173 (April 17, 2025), concerning the Department of Justice (DOJ) Recognition and Accreditation (R&A) application process and system of records, including Form EOIR-31, OMB Control Number 1125-0012, Form EOIR-31A, OMB Control Number 1125-0013, and CPCLO Order Number 01-2025. We appreciate the streamlining of the crucial R&A program, but urge DOJ to maintain the current security and confidentiality of participating organizations' records.

NALEO Educational Fund is the nation's leading nonprofit organization that facilitates the full participation of Latinos in the American political process, from citizenship to public service. Our Board members and constituency encompass the nation's more than 7,000 Latino elected and appointed officials and include Republicans, Democrats, and Independents. Recognized nationally as a civic engagement pioneer with more than 30 years of experience, NALEO Educational Fund has guided hundreds of thousands of eligible lawful permanent residents (LPRs) through the naturalization process. We have successfully advocated for policies that make naturalization more accessible. We also convene the Naturalization Working Group, the policy complement to the New Americans Campaign, the leading national collaborative devoted to increasing naturalization rates of eligible LPRs.

Because of our direct experience as a participant in the R&A program, and our leadership of a coalition that includes numerous enrollees who provide free and low-cost naturalization legal services, we believe that the R&A process is crucial to promoting U.S. citizenship and expanding the availability of expert assistance to qualified LPRs. The program's accessibility and adherence to the highest standards of security make it effective and ensure nonprofit organizations' robust participation.

We recognize that the proposed electronic streamlining of the R&A program application and records maintenance processes may lower burden for both participants and EOIR. However, this streamlining should not preclude organizations that may lack digital capacity from submitting paper applications and managing accounts through alternate means. Retaining the ability of organizations to submit paper applications is critical for ensuring that the broadest group of qualified enrollees have access to the program.

Moreover, a system that allows for electronic exchange of sensitive personally identifying information between agencies - in this case DOJ and the Department of Homeland Security, at minimum – must have strong protections against unauthorized access and use. The notices to which we respond would allow for unprecedentedly broad routine uses and scope of disclosures from the information R&A program applicants will submit, but they do not enhance security safeguards.

We are concerned that these proposed expansions of access come without apparent need after more than four decades of the R&A program's successful functioning. The heightened risk that organizations' personnel or operations may be exposed through participation in the R&A program could dissuade some from applying. Under these circumstances, there is a significant risk that community members who need legal support would lack access to services that would help them submit complete and error-free application materials. This would result in a greater burden, less efficiency, and more costs for the agencies responsible for adjudicating the applications. For these reasons, we urge DOJ to maintain the description of implicated records and permissible uses that currently govern the system of records related to R&A applications and certification.

Thank you for your attention to our comments. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to Rosalind Gold, Chief Public Policy Officer, rgold@naleo.org.

Sincerely,



Erica Bernal-Martinez
Chief Executive Officer



NALEO
Educational Fund