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USCIS neighborhood checks return in naturalization cases: What's at stake?

By Zofeen Maqsood — August 28, 2025



Beyond FBI biometrics, officers may interview neighbors, coworkers, and employers to verify eligibility, raising questions about fairness, civil liberties, and what applicants should expect in the months ahead. (Representational image)

“Love Thy Neighbor” may be an ancient commandment, but in 2025 it’s beginning to sound like a clause from the immigration handbook—especially when the neighbor mowing the lawn next door may also hold the power to mow down your immigration dreams if the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) comes calling.

This week, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) announced a major policy shift: the resumption of personal investigations for individuals applying for U.S. naturalization under INA 335(a).

The policy memorandum reads: “INA 335(a) directs USCIS to conduct investigations of aliens applying for naturalization unless waived by the Secretary of Homeland Security. These personal investigations, also known as neighborhood investigations, cover the vicinity of an alien’s place of residence and employment and include at least the 5-year period prior to the filing of the alien’s naturalization application.”

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(August 28, 2025)

Stating the purpose of the investigation, the memo explains: “to corroborate an alien’s eligibility for naturalization, which includes scrutiny of an alien’s residency, good moral character, attachment to the U.S. Constitution, and disposition to the good order and happiness of the United States.”

For decades, USCIS has largely relied on FBI biometric and criminal-history checks. What changes now is that USCIS will no longer generally waive the requirement for neighborhood investigations. Instead, it will review each case individually and determine whether a neighborhood investigation is necessary.

The new policy memorandum once again places additional onus on the applicant to prove that they meet the requirements for obtaining U.S. citizenship. Some fear that even applicants who have followed all immigration rules could see their cases jeopardized by a neighbor’s testimony, which may be inaccurate, uninformed, or motivated by petty personal grievances.

Experts say the reinstatement of neighborhood checks in citizenship cases raises serious concerns on many levels. Ryan Wilck, a partner at **Reddy & Neumann, P.C.**, where he advises on employment-based immigration, explained: “Allowing USCIS officers – which will more likely than not be ICE agents, masked and armed like they’re invading Baghdad – to interview neighbors, coworkers, or employers to assess

an applicant's "good moral character" risks injecting subjective opinions and personal prejudices into what should be an objective legal determination."

Attorneys also warn that the practice could backfire when neighbors harbor implicit or explicit racial or cultural biases.

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The policy is an internal guideline for USCIS officers on how they will handle naturalization cases going forward and does not create enforceable rights for applicants or third parties. Florida-based Leandro Carvalho, who specializes in tax, business, and immigration law at **Dell'Ome Law Firm**, explains, "It does not create any rights for applicants. It just changes how the USCIS will adjudicate naturalization cases."

Offering reassurance to those navigating the naturalization process, Carvalho says, "As the adjudication is based on a case-by-case basis, I believe the USCIS officer may request neighborhood investigations if they have any reasonable suspicion that an applicant does not meet the requirements for naturalization. I don't think it is feasible to make neighborhood investigations on all cases."

Another issue the new ruling may raise is individual privacy. As for whether it can be challenged as overreaching, Rekha Sharma-Crawford, co-founder of **Sharma-Crawford Attorneys at Law** at Law and known for her advocacy on complex removal defense and immigrant rights, characterizes the policy as invasive but not unconstitutional. She adds, "But, it certainly has the potential to be a violation of civil liberties. While the government has a right to investigate benefits claims, they are not entitled to breach someone's privacy rights. The fact is that it will slow down processing, it will create false positives, and it can become a way for people with nefarious motivations to weaponize this kind of inquiry."

Wilck also finds the privacy implications troubling. He says, "Citizenship applications are supposed to be confidential, yet this policy effectively exposes an applicant's

immigration status to third parties. USCIS will ask invasive questions intended to make everyone fearful.”

As for what applicants should brace for right now, Sharma-Crawford says, “Applicants need to be aware that there will be heightened inquiry and scrutiny around their citizenship applications. They also need to understand that their neighbors may now become aware of their immigration status, and that is concerning, especially in the current political climate.”

Underlying the update is a broader concern: that the new approach to naturalization raises alarming questions about fairness, rights, and community trust. Ryan Wilck says, “What’s most concerning is that USCIS will punish applicants for the community’s exercise of constitutional rights, since neighbors have no obligation under the 4th or 5th Amendments to speak with government officials. The result is a policy that intentionally fuels discriminations, undermine trust in communities, and creates inconsistent, arbitrary outcomes in naturalization cases.”

[naturalization](#)[neighborhood checks](#)[USCIS](#)

Zofeen Maqsood

Zofeen Maqsood is the Immigration and Community Editor at The American Bazaar. She covers U.S. immigration, diaspora stories, and community developments. She has reported extensively on immigrant experiences and cross-cultural issues, bringing a global perspective to local stories. Her background includes working with some of the world’s largest-read English dailies such as The Times of India, Hindustan Times, and India Today.

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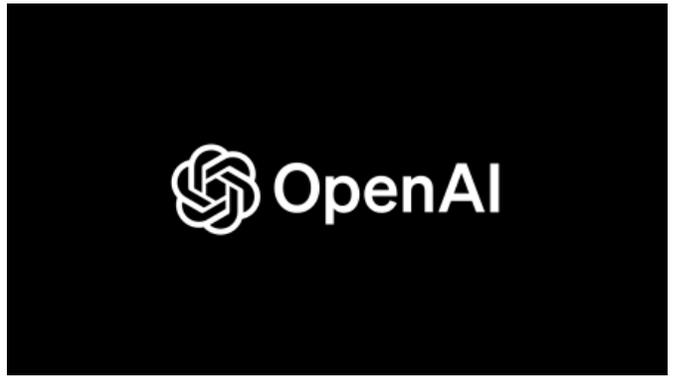
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Srinivas Rautwar elevated to CIO at American Systems

By Arun Kumar — August 28, 2025 ⌚ 2 Mins Read



Srinivas Rautwar

Srinivas Rautwar, a 25-year IT industry veteran, has been promoted to chief information officer at American Systems specializing in mission essential and information engineering services. The Indian American executive succeeds Brian Neely, who retired after over 20 years in the role, the Chantilly, Virginia-based company announced in a media release.

As part of his new responsibility, Rautwar will drive the strategic direction, focusing on planning, technology management, security and information management across the employee-owned company.

According to Rautwar, he will focus on harnessing emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, while continuing the company's security-first culture and addressing government compliance requirements.

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"I am humbled to continue the legacy of my predecessor, Brian, and honored to have been selected to help drive our company forward," he said. "As CIO, my focus will be on leveraging emerging technologies like machine learning and AI, continuing our security-first culture, and ensuring we stay ahead of evolving government compliance requirements."

"After conducting a thorough search of internal and external candidates, Srinivas was a natural choice to fill this position on our Executive Leadership Team," American Systems president and CEO John Steckel stated. "He is an accomplished senior IT leader with a proven track record of driving enterprise capabilities by leading IT vision, strategy and large-scale project initiatives."

Rautwar joined American Systems in 2007 most recently serving as the director of IT operations. With more than 25 years of experience in IT and business process improvement, he previously served as a senior IT specialist at IBM and a consultant at PricewaterhouseCoopers. Before that, Rautwar was a senior consultant and programmer analyst at Cognizant Technology Solutions.

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He earned a Bachelor of Technology degree from Sri Venkateswara University in India.

Rautwar helped lead American Systems to a perfect score of 110 in earning Cybersecurity Maturity Model Certification Level 2 in June 2025, following an accredited C3PAO assessment. The achievement places the company among a small group of federal contractors nationwide.

Based in Chantilly, Virginia, American Systems has been delivering IT and Engineering solutions to complex national priority programs since 1975. A government services contractor, it's focused on delivering valued services in areas of national priority.

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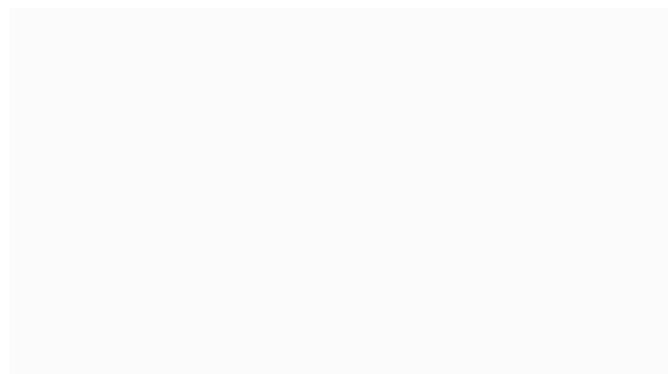
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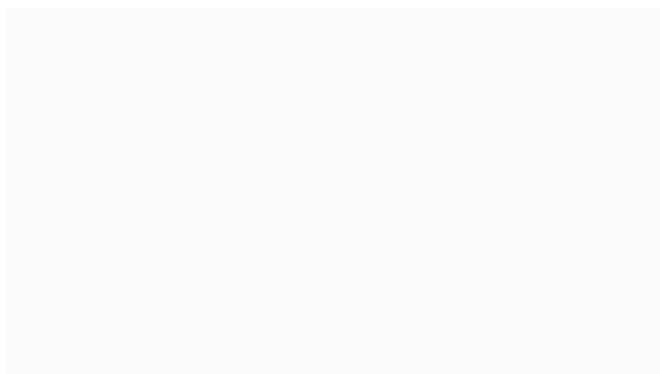
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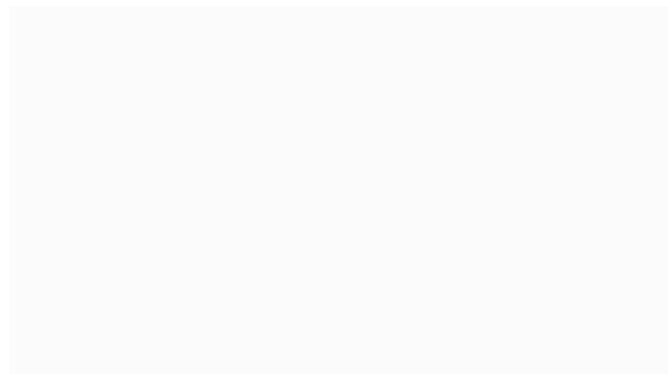
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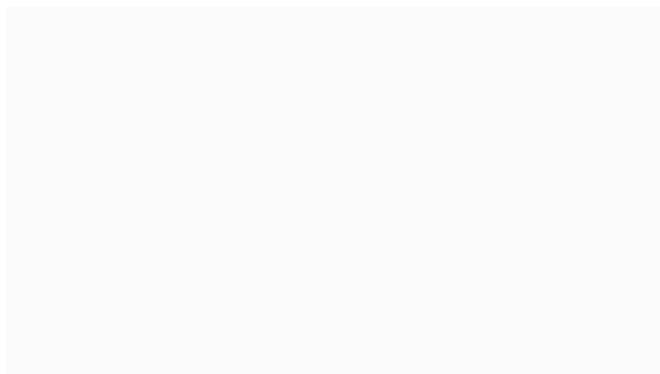
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