25th Annual AILA New York Chapter Immigration Law Symposium

With immigration policy in constant flux under the current administration, it is important for you, as a practitioner, to stay on top of the many significant changes. Join the AILA New York Chapter at our annual symposium on December 7, 2026, for a full day of timely updates, practical insights, and thought-provoking discussions covering the latest developments in immigration law. Our program, divided into two tracks—Business and Removal/Humanitarian/Family—will bring together experienced immigration practitioners, former immigration judges, and former government agency employees for candid conversations about the issues shaping immigration practice today. Our expert panelists will explore hot topics and emerging trends, recent and anticipated changes in the law, evolving government policies and priorities, and technology and artificial intelligence. They will focus on what these developments mean for you and your clients. The aim of this symposium is to sharpen your knowledge and skills, arming you with the necessary information you need to put to work in your practice immediately. In addition, time is built into the program for you to network and exchange ideas with colleagues across New York's vibrant immigration bar, so don't miss this exciting opportunity!

Note: *New York CLE credit will be available, including Ethics, Cybersecurity, and Skills specialized credits.*

*There will **not** be a webcast option available for the symposium this year. As a result, the sessions will not be recorded.*

December 7, 2026
New York Marriott Marquis
New York, NY

Times listed on the program are Eastern Time (ET)
Note: *All sessions and events are subject to change without notice.*

Monday, December 7, 2026

8:30 am – 5:00 pm **REGISTRATION AND EXHIBITS**

(DL) = Discussion Leader
* = invited, not confirmed
Note: All sessions and events are subject to change without notice.

Business Track

9:00 am–9:15 am **WELCOME AND GREETINGS**
Rachel Baskin, Conference Business Track Chair, Garden City, NY

9:15 am–10:15 am **HOT TOPICS I: THE STATE OF U.S. IMMIGRATION FOR EMPLOYMENT-BASED CASES**
AILA leaders will provide updates on the latest statutory, judicial, and policy developments shaping business immigration. They will highlight key trends and provide forward-looking insights for practitioners advising corporate clients.

- Recent regulatory and fee changes affecting employment-based visa categories
- Emerging litigation challenging new government policies
- Agency modernization initiatives, digital filing, and artificial intelligence (AI)-driven adjudication trends
- Congressional and executive actions impacting corporate compliance and global mobility

Faculty:
Cora-Ann V. Pestaina (DL), AILA New York Chapter First Vice Chair, Livingston, NJ
Jeff Joseph, AILA President, Denver, CO
Alexis S. Axelrad, AILA President-Elect, New York, NY

10:15 am–10:45 am **NETWORKING BREAK**

10:45 am–11:45 am **LATEST GOVERNMENT AGENCY UPDATES**
Panelists will address the latest government agency updates, including those from U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), as well as from former U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and U.S. Department of State (DOS) officials.
Faculty:
Melissa B. Drennan (DL), AILA New York Chapter Secretary, New York, NY
Steven D. Heller, AILA DOS Liaison Committee Chair, New York, NY
Jonathan R. Micale, Dallas, TX
**Kenneth Genalo, New York Field Office Director, ERO, ICE, New York, NY*
**Francis J. Russo, Director of Field Operations, New York Field Office, CBP, New York, NY*

11:45 am–12:45 pm **LUNCH BREAK**

12:45 pm–1:45 pm **JUDGMENT REQUIRED: ETHICS IN I-9 AND E-VERIFY COMPLIANCE (ETHICS)**
As I-9 and E-Verify compliance becomes increasingly technology-driven and standardized, immigration attorneys face complex ethical questions that extend beyond employment verification requirements. Through real-world scenarios, speakers on this advanced panel will

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explore issues involving privilege, technology competence, compliance programs, and multidisciplinary legal challenges, highlighting the critical role of professional judgment in navigating modern compliance practice.

- Navigating privilege, work product protection, and confidentiality obligations in compliance counseling, audits, investigations, and government inquiries
- Technology competence and ethical obligations in electronic I-9, E-Verify, and AI-driven compliance
- Balancing standardized compliance programs and employer policies with the individualized legal analysis required by the rules of professional responsibility
- Spotting the question behind the question: recognizing broader legal and ethical issues hidden within routine compliance inquiries
- Ethics under pressure: managing compliance risks, government scrutiny, and client responsibilities

Faculty:
Sylvia S. Yong (DL), Conference Program Committee, Toronto, Canada
Lynn Cho, Conference Program Committee, Wilton, CT
Stacey A. Simon, Newark, NJ

1:45 pm–2:15 pm **NETWORKING BREAK**

2:15 pm–3:15 pm **HOW ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IS CHANGING IMMIGRATION PRACTICE: CYBERSECURITY, DATA PROTECTION, AND THE GOVERNMENT (CYBERSECURITY)**

Artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming both the practice and administration of immigration law. Panelists will explore how attorneys use AI for research, drafting, business development, and practice management, while also examining USCIS's growing use of AI in immigration adjudications and operations. They will discuss practical applications, ethical considerations, cybersecurity and privacy risks, and best practices for the responsible use of AI in immigration practice.

- AI in immigration practice: practical uses of generative AI for research, drafting, review, and business development
- Cybersecurity, privacy, and data protection: safeguarding confidential information when using AI tools and platforms
- Responsible AI governance: evaluating AI vendors, developing firm policies, and managing ethical risks
- AI in marketing and client communications: key considerations for the appropriate use of AI-generated content
- USCIS and government AI initiatives: examining current use cases and implications for adjudications, fraud detection, and case processing

Faculty:
Carolyn S. Alvarez (DL), Conference Program Committee, Long Island City, NY

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Remzi G. Kulen, Conference Program Committee, New York, NY
Vijay Bhagwati, Lawrence Township, NJ

3:15 pm–3:45 pm **NETWORKING BREAK**

3:45 pm–4:45 pm **END OF DURATION OF STATUS: IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDENTS/SCHOLARS AND THE EMPLOYMENT LANDSCAPE (SKILLS)**
The end of duration of status is finally here. Panelists will provide an overview of the major regulatory changes, discuss the new processes for students/scholars, and examine the impact of these changes on the pipeline of highly skilled workers in the United States.

- Overview of the major changes in the duration of status regulations
- Preparing employers and students for success: practical tips to keep track of expiring status and frequent extensions
- Damage control: how to put students back in status with all these complicated scenarios

Faculty:
Lucy G. Cheung, AILA USCIS Operations Committee Chair, Conference Program Committee, New York, NY
Scott Gorski, New York, NY
Gwyneth Smith, Interim Director, International Students & Scholars Office, Columbia University Irving Medical Center, New York, NY

4:45 pm–5:00 pm **CLOSING REMARKS**
Rachel Baskin, Conference Business Track Chair, Garden City, NY

5:00 pm **CONFERENCE CONCLUDES**

5:30 pm – 8:30 pm **2026 AILA NEW YORK CHAPTER HOLIDAY PARTY**
The AILA New York Chapter invites chapter members and conference registrants to attend their 2026 Holiday Party after the program concludes. No payment required to attend. Appetizers and drinks will be served.
BEA Restaurant and Bar, 403 West 43rd Street

Removal, Humanitarian, and Family-Based Track

9:00 am–9:15 am **WELCOME AND REMARKS**
Sarah Lachman, AILA Board of Directors/New York Chapter Chair, Conference Program Committee, New York, NY

9:15 am–10:15 am **ADJUSTMENT OF STATUS AFTER THE USCIS "DISCRETION" MEMORANDUM, AND THE REMOVAL CASE THAT MAY FOLLOW (SKILLS)**
Adjustment of status has been reframed. Panelists will address the practical consequences of May 21, 2026, USCIS policy memorandum treating adjustment as a measure of extraordinary discretion. They also will discuss the downstream removal exposure created by

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current Notice to Appear (NTA) policy, and how to counsel clients whose best immigration path may now run through a consulate rather than a USCIS field office.

- Negative factors moving adjudications versus a record of persuasive, favorable factors
- File here or process abroad? Building the comparative risk analysis and documenting the client's informed decision
- Dual-intent clients caught in the shift: H-1B/H-4 and L-1/L-2 families with clean status histories
- *Matter of DelCarmen-Lara* (BIA 2026): counseling impacted clients and preserving retroactivity arguments
- Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) cases pushed into removal proceedings: handling the NTA and subsequent hearings
- Creative posture in court and preserving federal review: termination, administrative closure, continuance to re-file, and the mandamus/Administrative Procedure Act overlay

Faculty:
Marie Lurye (DL), Brooklyn, NY
Jacqueline Watson, AILA First Vice President, Austin, TX
Raisa Cohen, Forest Hills, NY

10:15 am–10:45 am **NETWORKING BREAK**

10:45 am–11:45am **AFFIRMATIVE AND DEFENSIVE ASYLUM WHEN YOU NEVER GET A MERITS HEARING (SKILLS)**

Asylum claims are increasingly resolved without testimony. Panelists will address how pretermission motions are being litigated in practice, and they will examine the early impact of USCIS's policy permitting asylum officers to refer affirmative cases to the immigration court without an interview.

- Mega masters, in absentia hearings, and the growing procedural hurdles to having an asylum case heard, including the increased use of written pleadings to dispense of cases
- Drafting the I-589 and supporting declaration to survive a prima facie sufficiency challenge from the outset
- Responding to written and oral motions to pretermit, and preserving withholding of removal and U.N. Convention Against Torture (CAT) protection when asylum is pretermitted
- Affirmative cases referred to the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) without an interview: early observations, changes in the defensive posture
- Current appellate reality: applicable Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) deadlines, the effect of pending litigation, and substantial-evidence review after *Urias-Orellana v. Bondi*

Faculty:
Ginny Nunez (DL), New York, NY
Sarah Oppenheim, Conference Program Committee, New York, NY
Rosanna Eugenio, New York, NY

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11:45 am–12:45 pm **LUNCH BREAK**

12:45 pm–1:45 pm **CLIENT DATA IN THE CLOUD: CONFIDENTIALITY, ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, AND CYBERSECURITY IN FAMILY-BASED AND HUMANITARIAN PRACTICE (CYBERSECURITY)**

Family-based and humanitarian filings hold the most sensitive material a law office stores: medical and psychological records, family financial documentation, and personal histories of vulnerable clients. Panelists will examine counsel's strict confidentiality and data protection obligations under the applicable ethics rules, including in New York, as artificial intelligence (AI) enters the workflow. Moreover, they will address why confidentiality failures now carry elevated professional risk, with immigration judges possessing broader authority to impose sanctions under nebulous textual standards. Finally, they will discuss the New York City Bar's recent guidance on AI tools that record, transcribe, and summarize conversations.

- Sensitive data in I-485, I-751, and I-130 files: I-693s and vaccination records, other medical and psychological records, I-864 financial documentation, and other private records requiring the highest standards of care
- Vendor due diligence and provider-side human review: what to resolve before sensitive data is entered into an AI tool, including when a file should stay out entirely
- Practice management for the modern family file: cloud services, access controls, retention policies, and heightened duties to vulnerable populations facing aggressive enforcement
- Counsel under the microscope: data minimization, incident response, and confidentiality lapses as potential sanctions exposure before USCIS or immigration courts

Faculty:
Alfred A. Bridi (DL), New York, NY
Kimberley Felton, Conference Program Committee, Cohoes, NY
Gregory H. Siskind, AILA Author, AILA's Immigration Law Practice and Procedure Manual: A "Cookbook" of Essential Practice Materials*, 4th ed., Memphis, TN*

1:45 pm–2:15 pm **NETWORKING BREAK**

2:15 pm–3:15 pm **ZEALOUS ADVOCACY VS. RISK OF SANCTIONS: COMPETENCE, INFORMED CONSENT, AND ADVISING ON UNCERTAINTY (ETHICS)**

Competent representation in the face of new sanctions authorities raises the stakes of ordinary advocacy. Panelists will address the duty to advise when a benefit filing may trigger enforcement consequences, documenting informed consent for genuinely risky strategic choices, frivolous-filing exposure, the professional responsibility limits on generative AI, and maintaining a practice under sustained pressure.

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- Rules 1.1 and 1.4 under the ABA Model Rules of Professional Conduct in the discretionary era: the duty to explain exposure, and documenting informed consent for a high-risk strategy
- New rules on attorney sanctions and frivolous filings: what counts, who decides, and the potential impact on the practitioner
- Generative AI: verification obligations, candor to the tribunal, supervisory duties, and the sanctions exposure EOIR has signaled
- Successor representation after a firm collapse: managing inherited clients of a shuttered high-volume practice
- Practitioner sustainability under pressure, and AILA's role in advocating for the profession

Faculty:
Jack Jrada (DL), Conference Removal, Humanitarian, and Family-Based Track Chair, New York, NY
Kenneth Craig Dobson, New York, NY
Afshan J. Khan, Roselle, IL

3:15 pm–3:45 pm **NETWORKING BREAK**

3:45 pm–4:45 pm **BEHIND THE BENCH, 2026 EDITION: FORMER IMMIGRATION JUDGES ON A TRANSFORMED COURT (SKILLS)**

Immigration court has changed significantly (e.g., staffing, dockets), including the tools available to judges. Former immigration judges share what has changed on the other side of the bench and what still moves a decision, offering practitioners a rare look from the decision-maker's side of a thinner, faster docket.

- What has changed for immigration judges: staffing, docket pressure, and hearing time
- Increasing use of pleadings in lieu of master calendar hearings to keep cases moving, and the impact on respondents and their attorneys
- Pretermission and written pleadings: what a legally sufficient filing looks like from the bench
- New sanctions authorities and rules encouraging judges to penalize for "frivolous" filings: What actually constitutes frivolous?
- Evidence, credibility, and professionalism in the current adjudication environment: What still persuades?

Faculty:
David K. S. Kim (DL), Manhasset, NY
Jennifer Durkin, New York, NY
Donald W. Thompson Jr., Glen Rock, NJ

4:45 pm–5:00 pm **CLOSING REMARKS**
Sarah Lachman, AILA Board of Directors/New York Chapter Chair, Conference Program Committee, New York, NY

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Conference Program Committee

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Kimberley Felton, Cohoes, NY
Sarah Oppenheim, New York, NY

JJ Area, AILA Education Program Manager, Washington, D.C.

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