

# **Small Group Discussion Sessions**

*This year's Annual Conference features advanced, smaller, discussion-style sessions. They are a special feature **available only to in-person attendees**. Entry is first-come, first-served with no pre-registration. These sessions **will not be recorded** and are **not CLE-eligible**.*

**WEDNESDAY, JUNE 17, 2026**

## **ROOM #1**

8:00 am–9:00 am

### **Healing the Shortage: Navigating J-1 Physician Waivers in a Competitive Landscape**

*With physician shortages at record levels and increasing competition for J-1 waiver slots, navigating the Conrad 30 and federal waiver programs requires precise strategy, timing, and coordination between employers, state health departments, and federal agencies. Panelists will examine the waiver process from recruitment to approval, highlight recent state and federal policy shifts, and share practical tips for avoiding delays or denials. They also will explore creative solutions for challenging placements, specialist approvals, and transition to H-1B or permanent residence.*

- Overview of J-1 physician waiver programs: Conrad 30, HHS, ARC, DRA, SCRC and VA waivers
- State-level trends: priority categories, timelines, and variations in application requirements
- Strategies for securing waiver slots in high-demand states and handling late-season openings
- Best practices for employment contracts: worksite location, hours, termination clauses, and immigration compliance language
- Transitioning from J-1 to H-1B and beyond: timing issues, cap-exempt strategies, and green card sponsorship planning
- Special considerations for specialists, dual appointments, and underserved area verification

*Andrew J. Desposito (DL), Costa Mesa, CA*

*Jan M. Pederson, Bethesda, MD*

9:00 am–9:30 am

### **Networking Break**

9:30 am–10:30 am

### **Denaturalization**

*With the current administration's relentless anti-immigrant policies, the future of naturalized citizens in this country has become a significant concern. Panelists will discuss holding the government to its burden and preventing loss of citizenship.*

*(DL) = Discussion Leader*

*\* = invited, not confirmed*

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- Grounds for a naturalized citizen losing citizenship
- Recent trends: Where is it happening and what are the reasons?
- Defense strategies when your client enters denaturalization proceedings
- Cancellation or revocation of naturalization and its consequences for derivatives
- Bargaining tools in the event denaturalization is inevitable

*Gunda Y. Brost (DL), Cedar Falls, IA*  
*Lance Curtright, San Antonio, TX*

10:30 am–11:00 am  
**Networking Break**

11:00 am–12:00 pm  
**Complex Consular Processing for Families**

*Applicants and petitioners often encounter significant challenges when navigating NVC and consular processes, including complex documentation requirements, lengthy processing times, lack of case-specific communication, and inconsistent updates through the CEAC online portal. Panelists will provide the following tips in overcoming these challenges.*

- How to communicate with NVC and resolve issues
- Waiting times and routes to expediting or rescheduling interviews
- Advocating for exemptions to travel bans
- Identifying and dealing with situations that may prompt extreme vetting

*Adriana R. Robinson (DL), Annual Conference Committee, Bethesda, MD*  
*Beatriz T. Ballerini, Houston, TX*

12:00 pm–1:30 pm  
**Lunch Break**

1:30 pm–2:30 pm  
**What Comes Next? The Long-Term Plan for Retirement from Legal Practice**

*Considering and preparing for leaving law practice can be an emotional, as well as practical and financial, journey. People who take a thoughtful approach have a much easier transition. Panelists will discuss many of the questions that need to be answered and sources for aiding in these decisions. They also will address best practices for maintaining mental, physical, and emotional well-being through this significant life change.*

- Financial planning: Will you have enough assets to retire without additional income from other work options?
- Downsized roles in a continuing practice: rainmaker, “of counsel,” senior resource
  - Have agreements in writing
- Choices for selling or winding down a practice and all its assets: accounts, clients, staff, files, equipment, real estate, etc.

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- Planning for the emotional transition of separation from law practice: Who do you want to be?

*Lynn Calder (DL), Annual Conference Committee, Raleigh, NC*

*David A.M. Ware, Metairie, LA*

*Charity Anastasio, AILA Senior Practice and Ethics Counsel, Washington, D.C.*

## **ROOM #2**

9:30 am–10:30 am

### **Partnering with In-House Counsel to Build an Effective Immigration Program**

*Corporate immigration programs thrive on strong partnerships between outside counsel and in-house legal and HR teams. But what does true collaboration look like in today's fast-moving, high-stakes immigration landscape? Panelists will focus on how immigration attorneys can work more effectively with in-house counsel to develop, maintain, and optimize comprehensive immigration programs that balance business objectives, compliance obligations, and employee experience.*

- Understanding the in-house perspective and speaking their language
- Building immigration policy infrastructure, from case-by-case to programmatic
- Partnering with in-house counsel to offer practical, digestible training and develop other key relationships
- Supporting change management during growth or reorganization
- Tips for managing complex and changing relationships

*Angelo A. Paparelli (DL), Irvine, CA*

*Maria V. Delapp, Chicago, IL*

*Kirsten Kelly, Vancouver, Canada*

10:30 am–11:00 am

### **Networking Break**

11:00 am–12:00 pm

### **Practical Tips: Equity and Belonging in Your Firm**

*You've done the DEI trainings: Now what? Panelists will provide an update on the administration's current approach to DEI policy. They also will advise on best practices for fostering a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment where firm employees and clients are valued and respected, and where diverse backgrounds and perspectives are leveraged to enhance client service and firm success.*

- Developing a diversity mission and policy statement for your firm
- Creating and crafting a comprehensive educational toolkit
- Determining a method and plan for greater equity and accessibility for firm employees and clients
- Regularly evaluating and refining diversity mission, policy statements, and goals

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- Addressing employee concerns about explicit DEI policies

*Olivia Serene Lee, AILA Board of Directors, San Francisco, CA*

*Michelle Celleri, San Diego, CA*

*MyungJin 'MJ' Lee, Boston, MA*

12:00 pm–1:30 pm

**Lunch Break**

1:30 pm–2:30 pm

**I-751 Waivers**

*When a joint I-751 filing is no longer possible, waiver options become essential, but nuanced. Panelists will explore the legal standards and strategic decisions involved in hardship and VAWA waivers, including how to handle evolving client circumstances, as well as intersections with removal and naturalization. They also will address both practical and procedural challenges in securing permanent residence under pressure.*

- Legal requirements and evidentiary strategies for extreme hardship and battered spouse waivers
- The impact of late filings and how to frame “good cause” for USCIS
- Options and pitfalls when USCIS denies the I-751 and the case lands in removal: review of the I-751 and using INA §237(a)(1)(H) as a lifeline
- Strategic considerations for filing N-400 with a pending I-751, especially during or after separation/divorce

*Guillermo M. Hernandez III, AILA Board of Directors, San Antonio, TX*

*Bernadette “Ginger” McGuire, Annual Conference Committee, Englewood, CO*

*Rina M. Gandhi, Fairfax, VA*

**THURSDAY, JUNE 18, 2026**

**ROOM #1**

7:30 am–8:30am

**Practical Approaches to J-1 Research Scholar for Private Sector Clients**

*The J-1 Research Scholar category is one of the most underutilized tools in immigration law, and most attorneys don't realize they're leaving cases on the table. This hands-on, classroom-style session is designed for practitioners new to the category who want to get practical fast.*

*Attendees will work through real, anonymized cases drawn from industries that may include biotech, pharma, tech, and startups, applying the law to real-life examples. The American Immigration Council, a Department of State-designated J-1 program sponsor, alongside experienced attorney practitioners will be in the room to demystify the sponsorship process from the inside and share how to identify and build J-1 Research Scholar cases in your own practice.*

- What qualifies as research, and what doesn't, beyond the academic setting

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*\* = invited, not confirmed*

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- Which roles and host organizations meet program requirements, and common disqualifiers
- How the sponsorship process works: the sponsor's role, the DS-2019, and typical timelines
- Case workshop: applying the eligibility rules to real private sector fact patterns across several industries
- Practical tips for spotting J-1 Research Scholar opportunities in your existing client base

*Diane Rish, Oxford, UK*

*Erica Carley Harris, Portland, ME*

*Lisa Murray, Washington, D.C.*

8:30 am–9:00 am

**Networking Break**

9:00 am–10:00 am

**Future of Law Practice: Trends, Tools, and Transformations**

*Join us for an engaging and forward-looking discussion exploring the future of immigration law practice. Drawing from the insights of the 2026 AILA Futures Report, panelists will examine how technology, shifting global mobility, policy changes, new business models, billing innovations, and the evolving legal workforce are reshaping how we practice. They also will discuss what the next decade may hold for immigration lawyers and, more importantly, how to prepare for the transformation.*

*Kirby G. Joseph (DL), AILA Future of Immigration Law Task Force Chair, Aurora, CO*

*Charina P. Garcia, Oakland, CA*

*Robert C. Meltzer, Hinsdale, IL*

*Reid Trautz, Senior Director, AILA Practice and Professionalism Center, Washington, D.C.*

10:00 am–10:30 am

**Networking Break**

10:30 am–11:30 am

**Former Immigration Judges and BIA Board Members**

*Ask former immigration judges and Board of Immigration Appeals members your pressing questions! During this discussion, our expert panelists will advise on best practices for presenting your removal case. Attend this session to garner advice on brief writing, motions practice, corroborating your client's claim, making legal arguments, putting witnesses on the stand, and handling challenging trial attorneys.*

*Susan G. Roy (DL), Princeton Junction, NJ*

*Lory D. Rosenberg, Annual Conference Committee, Asheville, NC*

*Maria T. Baldini-Potermin, Glenview, IL*

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Raisa Cohen, Kew Gardens, NY

## ROOM #2

9:00 am–10:00 am

### **No Longer Unremovable? Workshop and Information-Sharing About Removals to “Recalcitrant Countries”**

*The Trump administration has been successful in carrying out small numbers of removals to certain historically recalcitrant countries, including Vietnam, Cuba, Eritrea, and even Iran. In court, they seek to use these removals to defeat any Zadvydas habeas corpus petitions on behalf of nationals of those countries. Detained noncitizens with final orders of removal often must make a difficult choice between filing a motion to reopen with a stay of removal, a habeas corpus petition, or both. This small group will feature a discussion and information-sharing regarding topics including:*

- Current status of removals to historically recalcitrant countries
- Analyzing whether to file a motion to reopen, a habeas corpus, or both
- Successful strategies for habeas corpus

*Simon Y. Sandoval-Moshenberg (DL), Fairfax, VA*

*Kate Melloy Goettel, AILA Federal Court Litigation Section Steering Committee Chair, Iowa City, IA*

*Jennie Pasquarella, Kent, WA*

10:00 am–10:30 am

### **Networking Break**

10:30 am–11:30 am

### **Startup Visas Without a Startup Visa: Creative Paths for Entrepreneurs**

*In the absence of a formal startup visa in the United States, practitioners must stitch together existing categories—e.g., O-1, H-1B, E-2, International Entrepreneur Parole (IEP)—to meet the needs of startup founders and VC-backed companies. Panelists will provide a roadmap for building custom strategies amid increasing adjudicatory scrutiny.*

- Leveraging H-1B, O-1A, and E-2 creatively for founders
- Updates on IEP usage and challenges
- Structuring equity and cap tables for immigration compliance
- Role of accelerators and incubators in visa strategy
- Unique challenges and creative options for start-up founders and entrepreneurs facing delays or disruption

*Matthew T. Galati (DL), Elkins Park, PA*

*Chad C. Blocker, Los Angeles, CA*

*Helena Tetzeli, Miami, FL*

*(DL) = Discussion Leader*

*\* = invited, not confirmed*

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**FRIDAY, JUNE 19, 2026**

**ROOM #1**

8:00 am–9:00 am

**Visalaw.ai**

9:00 am–9:30 am

**Networking Break**

9:30 am–10:30 am

**Well-Being Olympics: How Sports, Music, Art, and Playfulness Make Us Better Lawyers**

*This data-driven session, employing a gameshow format, will help practitioners understand the scientific truth underlying the importance of playtime and fun.*

- Experts theorize that burnout is often the result of a lack of play, rather than just too much work
- How to find good in the worst moments
- Breaking the monotony
- Reasons and ways to incorporate more joy into our daily lives

*Lambert Dunn (DL), Jr., Annual Conference Committee, Oklahoma City, OK*

*Jennifer M. Howard, AILA Well-Being Committee Vice Chair, Aurora, CO*

*Esperanza Franco, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Spain*

*Morgan Rosinia, Buffalo Grove, IL*

10:30 am–11:00 am

**Networking Break**

11:00 am–12:00 pm

**Complex Waivers and Waiver Practice Under Scrutiny**

*Waiver practice has changed significantly in recent years. Panelists will discuss these various changes in waiver practice and adjudication, particularly under the current administration.*

*Panelists also will discuss strategies for handling these changes, long delays, and other complex issues that may arise.*

- I-212, I-601, and I-601A: best practices, pitfalls, and addressing delays
- Recent changes in adjudication under current administration
- Drafting compelling declarations and gathering persuasive evidence that meet current, seemingly heightened standards
- Strategizing in court for a I-601A: continuances, administrative closure, termination, reopening

*Rebecca Kitson, Albuquerque, NM*

*Eric R. Welsh, Pasadena, CA*

*(DL) = Discussion Leader*

*\* = invited, not confirmed*

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12:00 pm–1:30 pm

**Lunch Break**

1:30 pm–2:30 pm

**Trans Immigration Issues Under Trump 2.0**

*Our transgender clients face uniquely difficult obstacles navigating the immigration system under the current administration. Join this small group session led by panelists experienced representing transgender clients in a range of circumstances. Panelists will address the following:*

- Screening and “proving” transness
- Trans clients in detention
- Transgender asylum claims
- Documentation issues unique to trans clients
- How to be an ally as their attorney

*Dr. Elijah Maurus (DL), Spokane, WA  
Arielle H. Chapnick, Washington, D.C.  
Sarah B. Pitney, Washington, D.C.*

12:30 pm–3:00 pm

**Networking Break**

3:00 pm–4:00 pm

**Rigged by Design: Combatting the Now Ever-Present Bias in Immigration Adjudications**

*As bias in immigration adjudications has become increasingly visible, advocates are confronting a system in which fair hearings are no longer guaranteed. Recent federal court decisions have explicitly identified entrenched bias within EOIR. This off-the-record session will bring together litigators and advocates who have challenged adjudicator bias directly. Panelists will discuss how to continue building the record despite adverse outcomes, how collaborative AILA and movement led tools are documenting bias at scale, and how these materials can help shape both future litigation and the next adjudicatory system.*

- Recent federal court decisions and litigation efforts confronting bias in EOIR
- Using collaborative AILA resources to document adjudicator bias and preserve systemic claims
- Strategically deploying sample arguments, evidence packets, and brief banks to support motions for safeguards, reassignment, or record preservation
- Lessons learned from motions seeking a new Immigration Judge or other remedial protections
- Laying the groundwork for future impact litigation, even where relief is denied
- Reimagining a fair adjudicatory structure beyond the current system

*Rex Chen, New York, NY*

*(DL) = Discussion Leader*

*\* = invited, not confirmed*

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*Nikki R. Ramirez-Smith, Nampa, ID*  
*Alexis Ruiz, Atlanta, GA*  
*Stacy Tolchin, Pasadena, CA*  
*Bardis Vakili, Encinitas, CA*

4:00 pm–4:30 pm  
**Networking Break**

4:30 pm–5:30 pm  
**Capital Good Fund**

## **ROOM #2**

9:30 am–10:30 am

### **Advanced Trial Skills: Presenting Your Case at the Individual Merits Hearing**

*To present a strong case under this administration, advocates must draw on their full range of trial techniques. Sharpen your litigation tools by attending this advanced session, where expert panelists will review key skills and strategies to make your case and preserve the record.*

- Using exhibits during direct and cross examinations to strengthen your case
- Effectively guiding the testimony through direct and redirect
- Objecting to DHS evidence and questions and, when warranted, IJ questions
- Closings: preparing in advance and preparing during the trial; what to do when the IJ refuses closing arguments

*Genevra Alberti (DL), Annual Conference Removal Track Chair, Kansas City, MO*  
*Diana Tafur, Annual Conference Committee, Denver, CO*  
*Marie Celentino, Detroit, MI*

10:30 am–11:00 am  
**Networking Break**

11:00 am–12:00 pm

### **Effective Writing Before EOIR**

*Mastering effective memo and brief writing is critical in defending the rights and benefits available to respondents in removal proceedings and on appeal. Panelists will focus on the legal analysis and practical writing techniques necessary to win whether opposing a motion to pretermite a hearing, satisfying exhaustion requirements, or invoking governing circuit law.*

- Using an elements approach to set up your prehearing memo to the IJ
- Laying out your appeal brief to compel clear error review and avoid improper factfinding by the BIA
- How to aggressively challenge a DHS appeal of an IJ grant
- Requirements for writing a successful remand motion to the BIA
- How to effectively communicate your client's story

*(DL) = Discussion Leader*

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*Emily Brown (DL), Columbus, OH*  
*Kari E. Hong, Tucson, AZ*  
*Dr. Alicia J. Triche, Memphis, TN*

12:00 pm–1:30 pm

**Lunch Break**

1:30 pm–2:30 pm

**Mastering FLAG: Practical Tools for H-1Bs and PERMs**

*With the Foreign Labor Application Gateway (FLAG) now central to DOL filings, practitioners must go beyond theory and master the platform's practical features. Panelists on this hands-on session will walk attendees through real-world strategies for effectively navigating FLAG in the H-1B and PERM context, from initial drafting to final submission.*

- Best practices for drafting and tracking ETA-9035s and ETA-9141s in FLAG
- Leveraging FLAG's alert and case history tools to stay ahead of deadlines and agency actions
- Utilizing and communicating effectively with the FLAG Help Desk: templates, escalation strategies, and common pitfalls
- Tips for internal team collaboration and document management within FLAG's ecosystem

*Ian D. Wagreich (DL), Chicago, IL*  
*Daniella Anastasio, Jersey City, NJ*  
*Alexander Dgebuadze, Woodland Hills, CA*  
*Yesim Usluca, Washington, D.C.*

2:30 pm–3:00 pm

**Networking Break**

3:00 pm–4:00 pm

**Schedule A: Navigating Healthcare Immigration in a Time of Shortage**

*The U.S. healthcare system continues to face unprecedented labor shortages, particularly in nursing and physical therapy, with the demand for Schedule A green cards on the rise. Panelists will focus on **Schedule A healthcare immigration**, walking through the process step-by-step. They also will offer practical guidance on petitioning strategies, prevailing wage and visa screen requirements, consular issues at embassies, and long wait times at the I-140 and visa stages.*

- Current Visa Bulletin trends and retrogression in the EB-3 category
- Overview of the VCVC process
- Managing delays in licensure, NCLEX processing, and CGFNS certification
- Consular processing and compliance: Philippines DMW regulations, etc.
- DOL and USCIS adjudication issues

*(DL) = Discussion Leader*

*\* = invited, not confirmed*

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- Retention and ethical recruitment practices under the WHO Global Code

*Crystal Malik (DL), Richmond, VA*

*Yelena G. Vilks, Philadelphia, PA*

4:00 pm–4:30 pm

**Networking Break**

4:30 pm–5:30 pm

**AILA Lawyers Professional Responsibility Insurance Program**

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