



2026 AILA Annual Conference and Webcast

Wednesday, June 17, 2026

Fundamentals

8:00 am–9:00 am

Introducing Essential Terms and Concepts

This fundamentals session introduces the essential terminology, concepts, and rules every new immigration practitioner must master. Panelists will break down the building blocks of immigration law.

- Distinguishing nonimmigrant vs. immigrant
- Adjustment of status vs. consular processing
- Understanding visa vs. status, visa waiver, visa exempt
- Visa expiration vs. petition expiration date vs. period of admission
- Changing or extending status
- Identifying status violations, overstays, unlawful presence

Andrew L. Wizner (DL), Hartford, CT

Ari J. Sauer, AILA Author, AILA's Immigration Law Practice and Procedure Manual: A "Cookbook" of Essential Practice Materials, Memphis, TN

Matthew P. Dillinger, Austin, TX

Megan Kludt, South Hadley, MA

9:00 am–9:30 am

Networking Break

9:30 am–10:30 am

The Alphabet Soup of Nonimmigrant Visas: Part I

This session provides a fundamentals-level overview of the most commonly used employment-based and nonimmigrant visa categories. Panelists will introduce the purpose, eligibility criteria, and practice pointers for each category, equipping new practitioners with a basic immigration practice foundation.

- E-1 and E-2: treaty traders and investors
- H-1B, H-1B1, H-3, and E-3: temporary workers
- H-2A and H-2B: seasonal agricultural and non-agricultural workers
- F, J, and M: students and exchange visitors
- I: representatives of foreign media
- TN: Canadian and Mexican professionals
- Q: international cultural exchange visitors
- R: religious workers

Alex G. Isbell (DL), Philadelphia, PA

Matthew J. Maiona, Boston, MA

Kristi Quynh Ngo, Los Angeles, CA

Elissa J. Taub, Memphis, TN

10:30 am–11:00 am

Networking Break

11:00 am–12:00 pm

The Alphabet Soup of Nonimmigrant Visas: Part II

Part II of this fundamentals series introduces newer practitioners to a broad range of nonimmigrant visa categories, including those for diplomats, visitors, intracompany transferees, artists, athletes, family members, and certain victims of crime or trafficking.

- A, G, NATO, and N: diplomats and government representatives
- B-1 and B-2: business and tourist visitors
- C and D: in-transit and crew members
- K-1 and K-3: fiancé(e)s and spouses of U.S. citizens
- L-1A and L-1B: intracompany transferees
- O: extraordinary Individuals
- P: athletes, artists, and entertainers
- S: informants
- T: victims of human trafficking

Gabriel Castro (DL), Annual Conference Committee, Los Angeles CA

Mariam Arbabi, Toronto, ON

Rachel Baskin, Garden City, NY

Victoria Maria Morte, Waltham, MA

12:00 pm–1:30 pm

Lunch Break

1:30 pm–2:30 pm

Family-Based Immigration

“We are family,” but who is family according to U.S. immigration laws? Panelists on this introductory session will provide an overview of family-based immigration categories and prepare attendees for the more in-depth family-related panels.

- Definition of family members
- Definition of children
- Immediate relatives vs. preference categories
- Understanding annual quotas, priority dates, and the Visa Bulletin

Jonathan S. Greene (DL), Columbia, MD

Cathy Higgins-Mora, Wheeling, IL

Christina Liao Tong, San Diego, CA

A. Carin Weinrich, Seattle WA

2:30 pm–4:00 pm

Exhibit Hall Happy Hour

Family

6:30 pm–7:30 pm

TPS and Parole Programs: Current Status and Strategies for Our Clients

Temporary Protective Status (TPS) and parole programs are under attack in Trump 2.0. With so many long-term legal residents losing their status, it is critical to understand what alternatives may be available to our clients. This intermediate panel will review the current state of affairs with respect to TPS and parole programs, including an update regarding legal challenges.

- Current status of TPS designations and country-focused parole programs, including pending litigation
- Risks for TPS holders traveling on advance parole
- Continued viability of military parole in place
- Screening for alternatives, including humanitarian, family-based, and employment-based options

Enrique Espinoza (DL), Chicago, IL

W. Michael Sharma-Crawford, AILA Board of Directors, Kansas City, MO

Krsna Avila, Oakland, CA

Jorge A. Gavilanes, Atlanta, GA

7:30 pm–8:00 pm

Networking Break

8:00 pm–9:00 pm

Complex Naturalization: When to File, When to Wait, and When not to File

There are many pitfalls that negatively affect an applicant’s naturalization application and threaten denial or worse, the revocation of someone’s legal permanent residency.

Panelists will assess complex naturalization issues when helping clients navigate becoming U.S. citizens, and they will identify new requirements imposed by the current administration.

- Using all available tools to assess eligibility
- Criminal Issues and past misrepresentations, their impact and best practice
- Addressing newly expanded naturalization requirements, including good moral character
- Utilizing the Form N-648, Medical Disability Exception

Sarah E. McElwaney (DL), Highland, MI

Jennifer A. Kain-Rios, Denver, CO

Mary Kenney, Baltimore, MD

Sonia Parras Konrad, Des Moines, IA

Special Sessions

8:00 am–9:00 am

Overcoming Perfectionism and Procrastination in Immigration Practice

WELLNESS

Immigration lawyers are trained to be meticulous. But when attention to detail tips into perfectionism, or the pressure to “get it right” fuels procrastination, productivity and mental well-being suffer. In this candid and practical session, panelists will explore how perfectionism and procrastination show up in immigration law practice, especially in the face of constant deadlines, changing policies, and high-stakes client matters.

- Creating workflows that encourage progress over perfection
- Time management for the immigration lawyer’s brain
- Tools for getting unstuck in high-stakes casework
- Discuss when to let go of “perfect” in favor of meeting deadlines, preserving sanity, and trusting your legal training
- Managing procrastination in your team

Elizabeth Chatham (DL), Phoenix, AZ

Maricela Amezola, San Diego, CA

Timothy G. Payne, Chicago, IL

9:00 am–9:30 am

Networking Break

9:30 am–10:30 am

The Business Case for Global Immigration: Building a Practice Beyond Borders

As clients grow more international, immigration lawyers are increasingly expected to provide—or at least understand—global immigration solutions. But how do you get started in a practice area that spans dozens of legal systems, languages, and business cultures? This intermediate panel will offer practical insights into launching, scaling, and maintaining a global immigration offering, including strategies for cross-border collaboration and managing client expectations.

- Making the business case: why global immigration matters and how to integrate it into your firm
- Outbound, inbound, and global mobility: key distinctions and service models
- Building trusted referral networks abroad and managing compliance risks for U.S. firms
- Cultural fluency and client expectations: how to start learning and where to find resources

Paul L. Samartin (DL), London, UK

Farshad Owji, AILA Past President, San Francisco, CA

Vishal Chander, New York, NY

10:30 am–11:00 am

Networking Break

11:00 am–12:00 pm

Ethical and Strategic Dimensions of Marketing and Business Development ETHICS

Marketing and business development are vital for growing your immigration practice, but they must be done carefully. This advanced panel tackles both the creative and compliant sides of building your book of business. Panelists will explore innovative strategies to attract the right clients, develop a personal or firm brand, and expand visibility, while also unpacking the ethical boundaries that every immigration attorney must navigate.

- The difference between marketing and business development and how to align them effectively
- Navigating the ethics of promotion: advertising rules, disclaimers, testimonials, and social media boundaries
- Communicating your value proposition through thought leadership, community engagement, and lead generation
- Using AI and automation tools strategically while maintaining ethical and compliant referral practices
- Utilizing outside agencies versus keeping marketing in-house

Roman Zelichenko (DL), Annual Conference Committee, Kew Gardens, NY

Brittany Faith, AILA Board of Directors, Chattanooga, TN

Pavandeep Dhillon, Seattle, WA

John Q. Khosravi, Los Angeles, CA

12:00 pm–1:30 pm

Lunch Break

1:30 pm–2:30 pm

ILCA Panel: The Political Landscape for Immigration

Join Immigrants' List Civic Action for a discussion on the 2026 political landscape, addressing the urgent challenges facing immigrant communities and how we can fight back and reshape the narrative on immigration heading into the midterm elections.

Ira J. Kurzban, AILA Past President/AILA Author, Kurzban's Immigration Law Sourcebook, 19th ed., Coral Gables, FL
John Miyasato, Washington D.C.

2:30 pm–4:00 pm

Exhibit Hall Happy Hour

Business

6:30 pm–7:30 pm

Visa Solutions for Streamers, Gamers, and Content Creators

Today's audiences consume new types of digital media that don't always fall neatly into the government's visa categories. Learn about visa solutions for professionals in new and emerging fields of entertainment.

- Consular issues: when a B-1/B-2 or visa waiver is appropriate
- Social media disclosures and the potential impact on visa applications and entry
- Terminology and concepts in gaming, streaming, and content creation
- Strategic construction of O-1Bs
- Common RFEs and responses
- Travel considerations: preparing for consular interviews and red flags for CBP

Amanda Gupta (DL), Brooklyn, NY

Genie Doi, Gardena, CA

James W. Hollis, Memphis, TN

David Sindell, New York, NY

7:30 pm–8:00 pm

Networking Break

8:00 pm–9:00 pm

AI at the Gates: How AI is Reshaping Business Immigration Processing TECHNOLOGY

As AI-driven adjudication becomes embedded in USCIS, DOL, and CBP workflows, practitioners must adapt to opaque systems and unpredictable outputs. Our experts will unpack the expanding role of AI in intake, biometric scheduling, and decision-making. Panelists will equip attorneys with strategies to respond to automation's legal and ethical gaps.

- AI-generated RFEs and NOIDs: recognizing patterns and building effective rebuttals
- Lockbox and fee center automation: common errors, misfilings, and practical workarounds
- Use of AI in FOIA processing and the impact of algorithmic bias in adjudications
- Legal implications under the Administrative Procedure Act (APA), FOIA, and due process
- Opportunities for attorneys to harness AI for early risk detection and response drafting

Larry L. Drumm (DL), Piedmont, CA
Gregory Howard Siskind, AILA Author, AILA's Immigration Law Practice and Procedure Manual: A "Cookbook" of Essential Practice Materials, 3rd ed., Memphis, TN
Vijay Bhagwati, Lawrence Township, NJ
Sharadha Sankararaman, Irving, TX

Removal

6:30 pm–7:30 pm

Ethics in Removal Proceedings: Protecting Your Practice ETHICS

In today's political climate, immigration attorneys face unique pressures that make it more important than ever to uphold ethical standards while boldly advocating for clients navigating removal proceedings. Panelists will explore how to balance unwavering commitment to zealous representation with the essential responsibility to stay ethically grounded.

- Entering the case late: handling previously filed claims involving incorrect or false information
- Presenting changed circumstances when clients have not previously been able to tell their full story
- Filing skeletal asylum claims to get clients referred to proceedings
- Maintaining proper communication with clients, advising whether to proceed with the claim, and how and when to ethically withdraw

Lucy A. Betteridge, Kansas City, MO
Angela M. Graf, AILA Board of Directors, Las Vegas, NV
Matthew Blaisdell, Brooklyn, NY
David N. Simmons, Englewood, CO

7:30 pm–8:00 pm

Networking Break

8:00 pm–9:00 pm

Motions to Reopen, Reconsider, and Remand

Motions before the Executive Office of Immigration Review (EOIR) and the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) are an important part of preserving due process for our clients. Panelists will discuss using motions to advance clients' goals, avoiding common pitfalls, and best practices in drafting motions and legal memoranda. Topics will include:

- Deadlines for timely filing and responding to motions, how to approach untimely motions and argue equitable tolling
- Legal standards for motions to reopen, reconsider, and remand; updates in case law; increased fees
- How to draft and brief a persuasive motion, what evidence to file
- Stays of removal and when they aren't automatic: preventing your client's removal while the motion is pending
- Concurrent filing at the BIA and in federal court

Olsa Alikaj-Cano (DL), Houston, TX
Sui Chung, Miami, FL

George D. Pappas, Asheville, NC
Vinesh Patel, Dallas TX

Thursday, June 18, 2026

Fundamentals

7:30 am–8:30 am

Marriage-Based Adjustment of Status

This session introduces new practitioners to the adjustment of status (AOS) process in marriage-based cases. Panelists will discuss eligibility, documentation, and red flags, with practical guidance on handling sensitive client dynamics.

- Adjustment of status (AOS) steps and timeline
- Screening for INA §245(a) AOS eligibility
- Immediate and non-immediate relatives
- Preconceived intent and related admissibility issues
- Supporting documentation including I-864
- Ethical considerations in dealing with marital conflict

Kari Ann Fonte (DL), Coral Gables, FL

Karyn L. Todd, Miami, FL

Joseph Tsang, Artesia, CA

8:30 am–9:00 am

Networking Break

9:00 am–10:00 am

Consular Processing Part I: Nonimmigrant Visas

Consular processing is more challenging than ever. Nonimmigrant visa processing at the consulate has distinct steps and procedures that can be confusing. Panelists will cover essential steps, common pitfalls, and strategies for preparing clients and navigating consular communication.

- Consulate's role in visa issuance
- Interview scheduling procedure
- Visa reciprocity
- Third-country processing
- Preparing for nonimmigrant visa interviews
- Post-interview actions: administrative processing and denials

Mahsa Khanbabai, AILA Board of Directors, Easton, MA

Bernard Wolfsdorf, AILA Past President, Santa Monica, CA

Amy L. Peck, Omaha, NE

Jared C. Leung, Scottsdale, AZ

Gregory A. Wald, San Francisco, CA

10:00 am–10:30 am

Networking Break

10:30 am–11:30 am

Consular Processing Part II: Immigrant Visas

This session introduces new practitioners to immigrant visa (IV) processing at U.S. consulates. Panelists will explain the role of the National Visa Center (NVC), walk through required forms and medical exams, and outline the steps before and after the consular interview.

- Understanding the role of the NVC and consulates
- Understanding the Consular Electronic Application Center (CEAC) and document submission
- Medical exam and panel physicians
- Consular interview appointment
- Post-interview steps, including visa issuance and follow-up

Charlotte Slocombe (DL), London, UK

Ronald A. Nair, Annual Conference Committee, Norwalk, CT

Dagmar Butte, Portland, OR

Rob Cohen, Columbus, OH

11:30 am–1:30 pm

Lunch and Exhibit Hall Break

Business

7:30 am–8:30 am

A Business Immigration Lawyer's Guide to Removal Defense

When the unexpected Notice to Appear (NTA) arrives, even employment-based clients may find themselves in removal proceedings. Panelists will address everything from petitions to proceedings, and in doing so, they will equip business immigration practitioners with the tools to assess removability and identify relief.

- Common grounds of removability for employment-based clients (e.g., status violations, denied extensions, fraud findings)
- Jurisdictional analysis and strategic considerations following receipt of an NTA
- When and how to terminate proceedings versus administratively close
- Ethical duties of business immigration lawyers entering or referring EOIR representation
- Best practices for coordination between business, family, and removal counsel in complex cases

Julieta Andrea Grinffiel (DL), Dallas, TX

Sameer A. Khedekar, Mountain View, CA

Juliana G. Lamardo, Miami, FL

Ivan Yacub, Woodbridge, VA

8:30 am–9:00 am

Networking Break

9:00 am–10:00 am

Surviving the Storm: Strategic Status Preservation

In a climate of visa retrogression, procedural bottlenecks, and heightened scrutiny under the Trump administration, immigration counsel must be both proactive and agile. Panelists on this advanced session will offer practical strategies to help clients preserve nonimmigrant and immigrant status, prepare for consular uncertainty, and maintain long-term eligibility for green card benefits—even when timelines and policies are in flux.

- Managing EB-1 and EB-2 retrogression with downgrade strategies, cross-chargeability, and timing I-485/I-485 Supplement J filings in short Visa Bulletin windows
- Preserving status during prolonged adjudications, including RFEs, NOIDs, and late-stage nonimmigrant visa (NIV) extensions
- Strategies for clients approaching H-1B or L-1 max-out, including fallback NIV options, early green card steps, and recapture
- Travel considerations: use of advance parole, visa revalidation, and risks at CBP for applicants with pending cases
- Setting client expectations around green card delays, revocations, consular backlogs, and maintaining continuity of work and travel authorization

Jill S. Bloom (DL), Annual Conference Committee, Phoenix, AZ

Roujin Mozaffarimehr, Annual Conference Committee Business Track Chair, San Jose, CA

Reginald A. Pacis, Detroit, MI

Annamaria Racota, Toronto, ON

10:00 am–10:30 am

Networking Break

10:30 am–11:30 am

Getting to Green Card: Retaining Talent in a Shifting Legal Landscape

Foreign nationals are facing increasing uncertainty due to long green card wait times, increased scrutiny, and volatile adjudication trends. Panelists will explore how employers can strategically support foreign nationals, including student and H-1B holders, from initial OPT through permanent residence, while also managing compliance risks and workforce planning.

- Maximizing NIV extensions and navigating RFEs
- Strategic approaches for employers to support foreign nationals from student status (F-1/OPT/STEM OPT)
- Workforce planning strategies to mitigate the impact of visa unpredictability and long processing times
- Long-term retention: EB-2 NIW, PERM planning for early-career professionals

Lynn Marie O'Brien (DL), Annual Conference Committee, Tysons, VA

Anastasia Tonello, AILA Past President, New York, NY

Stephen D. Parker, Annual Conference Committee, Richardson, TX

David Grunblatt, New York, NY

11:30 am–1:30 pm

Lunch and Exhibit Hall Break

Removal

7:30 am–8:30 am

Nuts and Bolts of the Administrative Procedure Act and Mandamus

Have a case pending with USCIS for too long? Don't let your fear of federal district court stop you from pursuing a righteous claim. From becoming admitted in district court to filling out and serving summonses, panelists will prepare you thoroughly to file and fight in district court. Practitioners from all areas welcome!

- Performing due diligence to identify appropriate cases, and the applicable jurisdictional statutes
- Applying for admission to district court, CM/ECF login and Pro Hac Vice admissions
 - When and how to find co-counsel or a mentor
- Filing requirements and practical steps: how to file, including drafting the documents and summonses, who to serve, timelines and filing deadlines
- Making the government pay: Equal Access to Justice Act (EAJA)
- Problematic jurisdictions and cases: when mandamus may not go your way

Charles H. Kuck, AILA Past President, Atlanta, GA

Jessica Arena, San Francisco, CA

Waleed Naser, Chicago, IL

Leslie Dellon, Senior Attorney, Business Litigation, American Immigration Council, Washington, D.C

8:30 am–9:00 am

Networking Break

9:00 am–10:00 am

Advanced Trial Skills: Preparing for Individual Merits Hearings

Putting a case together requires an investment in the client, the evidence, and the law. Hear from experts on how to create a sustainable workflow in gathering evidence, preparing your client, drafting your legal brief, and preserving the record. Experts will discuss tips for effective client communication, how to distinguish your case from recent precedent, and ways to preserve Loper Bright issues.

- Creating a strategic case plan
- Working with experts
- Building a strong record
- How to prepare yourself and witnesses

Randall A. Chamberlain (DL), New York, NY

Kelli Stump, AILA Immediate Past President, Oklahoma City, OK

Lauren Anselowitz, Newark, NJ

Sarah Weston Hayes Owings, Atlanta, GA

10:00 am–10:30 am

Networking Break

10:30 am–11:30 am

Challenging Unlawful Arrests and Preserving Due Process in Immigration Court

In an era where raids, race-based stops, and often illegal arrests of clients can result in detention—from which it is increasingly more difficult to obtain release—motions to suppress and other tools will become increasingly important. Panelists will provide an update on recent litigation surrounding illegal stops and arrests. They will discuss the legal groundwork for motions to suppress and tips for using data about the government's illegal activities to support your claim.

- What the data shows: Who is being arrested, by whom, and on what grounds?
- What information to obtain regarding the manner of your client's arrest
- Fourth amendment challenges to illegal stops and arrests in the current mass deportation efforts (and how to deal with the 100-mile border zone excuse)
- Motions to suppress and motions to strike unlawful or unreliable DHS evidence
- How to use data on race-based sweeping enforcement actions and unlawful arrests by federal and non-federal agents

Ginger E. Jacobs (DL), San Diego, CA

John Patrick Pratt, Coral Gables, FL

Emma Winger Deputy Director, Litigation, American Immigration Council, Washington, D.C.

11:30 am–1:30 pm

Lunch and Exhibit Hall Break

Family

7:30 am–8:30 am

Detention for Family-Based Practitioners

Under the current administration, increased numbers of clients are being detained at USCIS interviews and biometrics appointments. This panel is designed to guide practitioners who primarily practice before USCIS in identifying when clients could potentially be detained at an interview, differences in practice between jurisdictions, and how best to handle a detention situation before it arises, in the moment, and immediately after.

- Identifying which clients may be targeted for detention at a USCIS interview
- Preparing your client for possible detention
- Ensuring adjudication of the benefit application despite detention
- Best practices for attorneys: steps to take before the interview, during the interview, and immediately thereafter

Scott A. Emerick (DL), Annual Conference Committee, Los Angeles, CA

Adrian N. Roe, Pittsburgh, PA

Rocio Sanchez Flores, San Diego, CA

8:30 am–9:00 am

Networking Break

9:00 am–10:00 am

My Adjustment of Status has Been Denied, Now What?

As denial rates rise for family-based petitions, practitioners must know how to push back. Panelists will explore post-denial remedies including motions to reopen, motions to reconsider, appeals, and strategic refiling. Panelists will cover recent adjudication trends and counseling clients during a turbulent era of family petitioning. They also will discuss available legal remedies and best practices, including:

- Strategies to address new trends in denials
- Using the record to your advantage post-denial
- Strategic use of motions to reopen/reconsider vs. refiling
- NTA issuance and renewal in court

Jonathan Willmoth (DL), Annual Conference Committee, Kansas City, MO

Nicholas Jesus Mireles, AILA Board of Directors, Los Angeles, CA

Elina Magaly Santana, AILA Board of Directors, Coral Gables, FL

Erin C. Cobb, Annual Conference Committee Family Track Chair, Chicago, IL

10:00 am–10:30 am

Networking Break

10:30 am–11:30 am

Challenging Racial Bias and Discrimination in Enforcement **BIAS**

Since January 20, 2025, immigration enforcement has brought unprecedented challenges to constitutional protections, with federal courts documenting systematic racial profiling while administrative policies simultaneously roll back decades of immigrant safeguards. Panelists will examine the intersection of discriminatory enforcement practices and policy reversals affecting both documented and undocumented immigrants nationwide, and how to combat these issues in your own cases.

- Current trends of discriminatory treatment across the immigration field
- Best practices for advising and preparing your clients who may face racial profiling
- Recognizing and combatting bias or racism in interviews and at ports of entry
- Preserving the record where racial profiling or bias affected the outcome of a case
- Determining next steps

Christine Yvette Brito (DL), Orange, CA

Rex Chen, New York, NY

Stacy Tolchin, Pasadena, CA

Carolina Castaneda, San Francisco, CA

11:30 am–1:30 pm

Lunch and Exhibit Hall Break

Special Sessions

7:30 am–8:30 am

Consular Practice: Services for U.S. Citizens

Whether traveling abroad temporarily or living abroad permanently, U.S. embassies and consulates are charged with assisting U.S. citizens with everything from routine citizenship and documentation questions to all manner of emergencies. These emergencies include international parental child abductions, arrests of U.S. citizens, emergency financial assistance, death of a U.S. citizen, and assistance with U.S. citizens as victims of scams and other crimes. Panelists will focus on practical insights and tips for assisting U.S. citizen clients with consular services.

- Issuance of U.S. passports, consular reports of birth or death abroad
- Notarial and other non-emergency services
- Renunciation of U.S. citizenship (and related tax compliance considerations)
- All manner of emergency assistance for U.S. citizens

Nita Nicole Upadhye (DL), London, UK

Scott Gregory, Annual Conference Committee, Toronto, ON

David Strashnoy, Los Angeles, CA

8:30 am–9:00 am

Networking Break

9:00 am–10:00 am

Using Immigration History to Address Today’s Challenges and Plan for the Future

As the current administration tries to update (and possibly dismantle) the immigration system as we know it, both lawyers and clients find themselves struggling to navigate and overcome unprecedented challenges. What lessons can be learned from our predecessors, who persevered through similarly restrictive periods in our nation’s immigration history? Panelists will discuss difficult periods from the past, and they will identify the successful actions and strategies immigration practitioners employed then that can be used to help clients now. They also will advise on how to advocate for change and quickly remedy recently implemented bad rules, policies, and procedures. Finally, panelists will explain how we can use history as a guide for establishing a future intergalactic immigration system.

- Review of challenging periods in immigration history: Chinese Exclusion Act, Immigration Act of 1917, AEDPA, and IIRAIRA
- Applying lessons learned from the past to today’s challenges
- Post-administration changes: how to undo the damage and implement systemic changes quickly
- “Lost in Space” no more: considerations for a future intergalactic immigration system

Gayle Oshrin (DL), Annual Conference Committee Chair, New York, NY

John L. Pinnix, AILA Past President, Raleigh, NC

Heather Drabek Prendergast, AILA Board of Directors, Cleveland, OH

Maurice H. Goldman, Tucson, AZ

Betsy Lawrence, McLean, VA

10:00 am–10:30 am
Networking Break

10:30 am–11:30 am

Make Your Voice Heard: Get Involved in AILA’s Political Engagement (*Not CLE Eligible*)

With the 2026 U.S. midterm elections fast approaching, AILA members and chapters have an opportunity to organize and move the needle. Panelists will walk through how AILA members can participate in AILA’s political engagement efforts, including the process for endorsing, supporting, or opposing candidates, and the various Get Out the Vote (GOTV) initiatives AILA chapters can pursue individually and in partnership with others. Learn how to organize and mobilize while helping change the immigration narrative to one that is accurate, fair, and upholds due process.

- Aligning member, chapter, and national efforts for a greater impact
- Building strategic partnerships
- Congressional advocacy
- Coordinating GOTV initiatives

Gregory Chen (DL), AILA Senior Director of Government Relations, Washington, D.C.

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

Christine J. Alden, AILA Distance Learning Committee Co-Chair/AILA Standing Committee on Political Engagement (SCOPE) Co-Chair, Miami, FL

Paul Rampersaud, AILA Grassroots Advocacy Associate, Washington, D.C.

11:30 am–1:30 pm

Lunch and Exhibit Hall Break

Plenary Sessions and Events

1:30 pm–3:30 pm

**Plenary Session: President’s Address and Keynote
Welcome Keynote: San Diego Mayor, Todd Gloria**

2:30 pm–2:45 pm

Networking Break

4:00 pm–5:30 pm

Hot Topics with AILA National Officers

This year has been one of immense change in our immigration system. Hear the latest as the AILA Executive Committee shares information on the most important issues affecting immigration practitioners.

Jeff Joseph, President, Aurora, CO

Alexis S. Axelrad, President-Elect, New York, NY

Jacqueline L. Watson, First Vice President, Austin, TX

Rekha Sharma-Crawford, Second Vice President, Kansas City, MO

Michelle Saenz-Rodriguez, Treasurer, Dallas, TX

David J. Wilks, Secretary, Rochester, NY
Benjamin Johnson, AILA Executive Director, Washington, D.C.

5:45 pm–7:15 pm

Membership Meeting and Awards

Friday, June 19, 2026

Fundamentals

8:00 am–9:00 am

Employment Compliance and Worksite Enforcement

Panelists will introduce new practitioners to key employment compliance obligations and government enforcement actions. They will review I-9 compliance, audits, and investigations, and they will provide an overview of employer and employee rights and obligations.

- What is an I-9?
- What is E-Verify?
- What is LCA compliance?
- What happens in a raid or site visit?
- Agencies to know: DOL, FDNS, ICE, HSI
- Ethical considerations when advising employers and employees

Katie Nokes Minervino (DL), Portland, ME

Fausta Maria Albi, San Diego, CA

Catherine Haight, Marina Del Rey, CA

Matthew Webster, Minneapolis, MN

9:00 am–9:30 am

Networking Break

9:30 am–10:30 am

Introduction to I-9 Compliance

Although I-9 completion and maintenance are typically handled by human resources, immigration attorneys are frequently called on to advise, as well. Panelists will provide new practitioners with an overview of I-9 basics, the attorney's role, and key resources to guide clients through compliance issues.

- Protocols for I-9 completion and retention
- The interplay of I-9 and E-Verify
- When to verify employment eligibility
- The attorney's role in advising on I-9 issues
- Key resources, including the I-9 Handbook

Shirley Tang (DL), Woodbridge, VA

Kimberley Best Robidoux, AILA Verification & Documentation Liaison Committee Chair, San Diego, CA

Marjorie Baltazar, Annual Conference Committee, Chicago, IL

Thao Gonzalez-Pho, Northampton, MA

10:30 am–11:00 am

Networking Break

11:00 am–12:00 pm

Professional NIVs: An Overview of H-1B and Its Alternatives

Panelists will cover core elements of the H-1B visa to establish foundational knowledge of the H-1B process and criteria. They also will cover alternatives to the H-1B for use during the year, when H-1B visas may not be immediately available.

- The evolving definition of “specialty occupation”
- Steps and timeline
- Labor Condition Application (LCA)
- Degree requirement and equivalencies
- Overview of the registration process
- Alternative professional visas: J-1, TN, H-1B1, E-2, E-3, Os, and OPT/STEM OPT

Stephanie S. Pimentel (DL), Annual Conference Committee, Richardson, TX

Sonal Sharma, AILA Board of Directors, New York, NY

Douglas R. Penn, Stamford, CT

12:00 pm–1:30 pm

Lunch and Exhibit Hall Break

1:30 pm–2:30 pm

Employment-Based Immigrants: The Preference Categories

Panelists on this session will introduce new practitioners to the employment-based (EB) immigrant visa preference system. They will provide an overview of the EB-1 through EB-5 categories, numerical limits, and the role of the Visa Bulletin in managing visa availability.

- EB-1: multinational executives and managers, extraordinary ability aliens, and outstanding researchers/professors
- EB-2: national interest waivers, aliens of exceptional ability, professionals holding advanced degrees
- EB-3: professionals, skilled, unskilled, and other workers
- EB-4: special immigrants
- EB-5: investors

Emma Marie Tuohy (DL), Philadelphia, PA

Carolyn Szaiff Alvarez, Annual Conference Committee, Long Island City, NY

Jacob Lawrence Ratzan, Miami, FL

2:30 pm–3:00 pm

Networking Break

3:00 pm–4:00 pm

PERM I: Basic Concepts and Essential Steps for Filing

The employment-based permanent residence process generally requires the U.S. employer to first obtain a certification from the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) that it has been unable to find willing, qualified, and available U.S. workers for the position to be offered to the sponsored foreign national. Panelists in Part I of this two-part series will discuss the basic concepts and steps associated with DOL's PERM process for preparing and filing applications for labor certification.

- Steps and timeframes in the labor certification application process
- Crafting the job description and identifying “actual minimum requirements”
- Prevailing wage determinations: what they are and when to obtain them
- Required recruitment steps and timing considerations
- Completing and filing the ETA Form 9089
- Roles of the various stakeholders: immigration lawyer, company contact, and foreign national

Yasmin Adelle Blackburn (DL), AILA Board of Directors/Equity and Belonging Committee Chair, Trumbull, CT

Ganesh Kalyanaraman, Sacramento, CA

Jihan H. Merlin, Marblehead, MA

Tejas N. Shah, Chicago, IL

4:00 pm–4:30 pm

Networking Break

4:30 pm–5:30 pm

Who Wants to be an Immigration Law Millionaire?

Audience members will be selected to play a fast-paced and educational game answering easy to difficult questions on a variety of immigration law issues. Contestants will “risk it all” by moving up the game’s financial ladder. Don’t know the answer? Poll the audience! Use a lifeline! Ask THE immigration expert: Ira Kurzban! Learn about the latest issues in immigration in this fun and interactive session. Arrive a few minutes early to enter your name into the drawing to be a contestant and for a chance to win a free registration for AC27!

Gregory Romanovsky (DL), Boston, MA

Ira J. Kurzban, AILA Past President/AILA Author, Kurzban’s Immigration Law Sourcebook, 19th ed., Coral Gables, FL

Stefanie Fisher-Pinkert, Boston, MA

Business

8:00 am–9:00 am

“Made in America”: Increasing U.S. Immigration

Panelists will address how “Made in America” and new tariffs are driving foreign companies to establish or expand manufacturing facilities in the United States. They will discuss strategies for transferring key foreign personnel to establish and ramp up operations in the United States and explore the fine line between permissible business

activities and productive work in compliance with viable visa options (B-1, J-1 specialist, L-1, Treaty/Trader Visas), regulations, and current immigration policies.

- Acceptable business visitor activity for training or knowledge transfer for foreign talent to train new U.S. workers
- Defining what constitutes “work”
- Ways that new U.S. companies/operations can leverage the H-1B, J-1 specialist, L-1 options, or the E-2 to bring foreign talent to the United States
- Structural considerations for new office H-1Bs
- Bulk E-2 visa applications at consulates

Michael P. Nowlan (DL), AILA Board of Directors/Business Section Steering Committee Vice Chair, Detroit, MI

Marketa Lindt, AILA Past President, Chicago, IL

Matthew Kolodziej, Annual Conference Committee, New York, NY

Melissa O. Nonaka, Annual Conference Committee, San Diego, CA

9:00 am–9:30 am

Networking Break

9:30 am–10:30 am

Drafting Successful PERMs for Unique Roles

With the FLAG system and the side-by-side reading of the Form 9141 and Form 9089, drafting a successful PERM is more challenging than ever. Panelists will review strategies for drafting the prevailing wage request and the ETA 9089 where the PERM role and/or the requirements are unusual and unique.

- Drafting PERMs for unique roles and backgrounds and nontraditional requirements
- Differentiating between roles with the same employer
- Licenses, skills, and experience requirements from non-employment sources
- Alternative minimum requirements: the PWD vs. the ETA 9089
- The continuing saga of travel and/or telecommute language

Maggie M. Murphy (DL), Annual Conference Committee, Austin, TX

La Verne A. Ramsay, Annual Conference Committee, San Francisco, CA

Bennett Savitz, USCIS Benefits Policy Practice Resources Subcommittee Vice Chair, Boston, MA

Robin D. O’Donoghue, Cambridge, MA

10:30 am–11:00 am

Networking Break

11:00 am–12:00 pm

Navigating F-1 Maintenance, Travel, and Renewals in a Shifting Landscape

F-1 students and graduates continue to face evolving guidance on maintenance of status, OPT/STEM OPT compliance, and application/visa renewals. From SEVIS reporting lapses to administrative processing delays, what used to be routine now demands strategic foresight and careful documentation. Panelists will address common pitfalls,

practical renewal strategies, and emerging trends in F-1 adjudications at both USCIS and U.S. consulates.

- Current legal trends and adjudication patterns in F-1 and OPT/STEM OPT cases
- Best practices for maintaining status during school transfers, reduced course loads, and STEM OPT extensions
- Visa renewal considerations
 - INA §214(b) risks
 - Travel planning post-OPT, including preparing for visa interviews and overcoming administrative processing delays
- Addressing SEVIS errors and employer reporting obligations under the Form I-983 training plan

Regina Mary Degnan (DL), New York, NY

Flavia Santos Lloyd, Annual Conference Committee Fundamentals Track Chair, Newport Beach, CA

Maka Hutson, Dallas, TX

Benjamin Snyder, Charlotte, NC

12:00 pm–1:30 pm

Lunch and Exhibit Hall Break

1:30 pm–2:30 pm

At the Embassy: Recent Trends

Panelists on this intermediate panel will focus on what is happening at various U.S. embassies and ports of entry, with a focus on navigating the evolving consular process from DS-160 prep and the attorney's role, appointment scheduling, and everchanging passport policies.

- Phased out of interview waiver for most applicants and renewed requirements for minors and senior applicants
- Attorney's role in DS 160 preparation, client interview preparation, and post denial strategy
- Social media disclosure policies and how they influence security clearance and vetting
- Regional differences in consular practice and how to manage expectations in high volume posts
- Special considerations: travel ban, bond requirements, system backlogs, and staffing shortages

Matthew Hughes (DL), Portland, OR

Melissa Chavin, AILA Board of Directors, London, UK

Avi Friedman, Santa Monica, CA

Olivia M. McLaren, Edinburgh, UK

2:30 pm–3:00 pm

Networking Break

3:00 pm–4:00 pm

The Disappearing Visa: When USCIS Approval Isn't the Endgame

USCIS petition approval is no longer a reliable indicator of visa issuance. In today's heightened enforcement climate, consular officers are exercising broad discretion to deny, delay, or reverse approved petitions—often without meaningful recourse. Panelists on this advanced session will explore the growing gap between USCIS adjudications and visa issuance, focusing on strategies for client preparation, damage control, and long-term case recovery.

- Scope of consular discretion, INA §221(g) holds, and the limits of judicial review under the doctrine of consular nonreviewability
- DOS policies on material change, petitioner or beneficiary substitution, and visa revocation triggers
- How to prepare clients for potential reversals or administrative processing at interview—even with clean records and prior approvals.
- Effective post-denial strategies, including congressional inquiries, INA §212(d)(3) waivers, and reentry alternatives

Mandy Feuerbacher (DL), Los Gatos, CA

Diane Holcombe-Geddens, Arlington, VA

Lynn Marie Lee, Clifton, VA

Daniel J. Parisi, Madrid, Spain

Removal

8:00 am–9:00 am

Navigating the Complexities of Mental Illness in Removal Proceedings

Representing clients with limited competency in removal proceedings presents unique ethical and litigation challenges. Panelists will empower advocates to identify when a client's mental illness or limited competency could affect their removal proceedings, and they will advise on how to advocate zealously for clients in this vulnerable position. They also will provide an update on relevant legal developments and trends.

- Trauma-informed and ethical advocacy for clients with diminished capacity
- Removal defense strategies for clients experiencing diminished capacity, including the use of expert witnesses
- Utilizing the ADA and Rehabilitation Act to advocate for clients
- Updates on legal developments affecting respondents with mental health concerns

Shannon Johnson (DL), Annual Conference Committee, Florence, AZ

Andres Lopez, AILA Board of Directors/Governance Committee Chair, Charlotte, NC

Ava Benach, AILA Board of Directors, Washington, D.C.

Karla Marie Ostolaza, Bronx, NY

9:00 am–9:30 am

Networking Break

9:30 am–10:30 am

Who is Even Eligible for Bond Anymore?

Panelists will unpack the evolving landscape of bond eligibility in immigration court, shaped by shifting government policies and interpretations. They will examine key legal updates and offer practical strategies for navigating complex custody issues. Topics will include:

- When immigration judges lack authority to grant bond: arriving aliens, those (truly) subject to INA §235, and mandatory detention under INA §236(c)
- When the government is wrong: legal strategies to dispute improper claims of mandatory detention or no jurisdiction
- Recent developments
- Ethical responsibilities: representing detained clients, evaluating whether to file a bond motion, and considerations around charging for such representation

Andrew J. Rankin (DL), Memphis, TN

Brian P. Casson, Falls Church, VA

Liliana Jurado, Pompano Beach, FL

Susan G. Roy, Princeton Junction, NJ

10:30 am–11:00 am

Networking Break

11:00 am–12:00 pm

Immigration Policy a Year into Trump’s Second Term: What’s Happening and Where We’re Headed

Experts from the American Immigration Council will discuss the latest developments in immigration policy. Topics will include:

- The impact of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act on interior immigration enforcement and mass deportation
- Unprecedented use of immigration detention
- Restrictions on legal immigration and humanitarian programs such as TPS and refugees
- Relentless attacks on local communities

Mo Kantner (DL), Senior Director of Policy and Research, American Immigration Council, San Diego, CA

Nayna Gupta, Policy Director, American Immigration Council, Washington, D.C.

Adriel Orozco, Senior Policy Counsel, American Immigration Council, Washington, D.C.

Aaron Reichlin-Melnick, Senior Fellow, American Immigration Council, Washington, D.C.

12:00 pm–1:30 pm

Lunch and Exhibit Hall Break

1:30 pm–2:30 pm

Habeas Corpus: Challenging Prolonged or Unlawful Detention

As ICE rapidly expands immigration detention around the country, more of our clients are deprived of their liberty and due process rights. In this intermediate panel, panelists

will discuss the writ of habeas corpus as a tool to fight back. They also will provide practical advice on litigating these cases.

- Filing habeas petitions when your client has been re-detained after a grant of parole or a bond
- Habeas as a tool for challenging expedited removal and mandatory detention/alleged lack of jurisdiction under recent BIA case law
- Temporary restraining orders, orders to show cause, preliminary injunctions, and when to use them
- Discovery requests and meeting the good cause standard
- Venue: how to avoid unfriendly jurisdictions via declaratory judgement and/or mandamus

Annelise Araujo (DL), Boston, MA

Robert Pauw, AILA Author, Litigating Immigration Cases in Federal Court, 7th ed., Seattle, WA

Jessica Dawgert, Falls Church, VA

David Isaacson, New York, NY

Rebecca Cassler, Senior Litigation Attorney, American Immigration Council, Washington, D.C.

2:30 pm–3:00 pm

Networking Break

3:00 pm–4:00 pm

What is Going on at the BIA?

With what appear to be political staffing decisions, as well as a newfound penchant for taking non-precedent decisions and suddenly publishing them (all of which conveniently consist of the BIA overturning IJ grants), it is time to investigate what is going on at the BIA and what we can do about it. Panelists will address the following:

- Trends in recent BIA decisions, including improper fact-finding, re-weighting evidence, accepting appeals by DHS after they raised no issues at trial, and more
- Defensive briefing and making the record at trial
- Strategies for your cases: distinguishing adverse authority, preserving issues for appeal, and raising *Loper Bright*–based challenges

Ben Winograd (DL), Alexandria, VA

Katharine Clark, Bethesda, MD

Lory D. Rosenberg, Asheville, NC

Andrea Sáenz, New York, NY

David H. Wetmore, Bethesda, MD

4:00 pm–4:30 pm

Networking Break

4:30 pm–5:30 pm

The Defender's Complicated Toolbox

Many clients present criminal histories that trigger immigration consequences. Expert counsel can see the path through or around those problems by mitigating their applicability or establishing eligibility for discretionary relief, notwithstanding a conviction or challenging facts. Panelists will discuss:

- Capitalizing on the many iterations of INA §212(c) and §212(h) waivers
 - Standalone
 - Applicability of time and aggravated felony bars for relief
 - Future re-immigration
- Burdens of proof:
 - *Pereida v. Wilkinson*
 - Divisible statutes and the realistic probability test, distinguishing the elements-based and conduct-based categorical approaches
 - Dismissal and termination
- Lurking modern issues in “admitting” (e.g. *Matter of K*) and “admission” (e.g. *Matter of Kazemi*)

Andrew Nietor (DL), AILA Board of Directors, San Diego, CA

Sara Ellen Mahoney, Brockton, MA

Michael S. Vastine, Gulfport, FL

Family

8:00 am–9:00 am

Trust but Verify: Navigating FOIA Requests, Fraud Risks, and Ethical Boundaries

ETHICS

In today’s complex immigration landscape, thorough ethical client vetting is essential for effective representation and risk mitigation. Panelists will guide practitioners through the nuanced process of how to vet clients ethically using Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests across various agencies, including strategies for appealing denied or incomplete FOIA responses, and consideration of use of other forms of vetting.

- Ethical considerations of deep-dive vetting: How far is too far? Where do we draw the line between due diligence and overreach?
- Who and how to FOIA, and how to protect your client when filing
- The value of FOIAs as a regular part of practice: previously filed and possibly inconsistent applications, forgotten or unknown orders of removal
- Challenging incomplete agency FOIA responses
- Additional vetting options: social media activity and third-party background checks

Patrick F. Valdez (DL), Inglewood, CA

Angela Marie Cifor, Greenwood Village, CO

Matthew L. Hoppock, Shawnee, KS

Raul A. Pinto, Deputy Director of Transparency, Legal, American Immigration Council, Washington, D.C.

9:00 am–9:30 am

Networking Break

9:30 am–10:30 am

Juneteenth: More Than Free, Black Immigration Lawyers on Power, Purpose, and Persistence (Not CLE Eligible)

AILA celebrates Juneteenth with a panel of Black immigration lawyers and professionals reflecting on what it means to lead, advocate and thrive within systems that have not always been designed with them in mind.

- Reflections on Juneteenth and the meaning of freedom
- Navigating the intersection of race identity and advocacy
- Personal stories of persistence and purpose
- Visions for solidarity and systemic change

Dustin O'Quinn (DL), Seattle, WA

Allen Orr, AILA Past President, Washington, D.C.

Jalyn Mathis, Lawrenceville, GA

Brenda Oliver, Reston, VA

10:30 am–11:00 am

Networking Break

11:00 am–12:00 pm

Intricacies of LGBTQ+ Family-Based Cases **BIAS**

In times when the administration is more hostile than ever toward LGBTQ+ people, it is vital that practitioners understand issues that are specific to LGBTQ+ immigrants.

Panelists will examine the treatment of LGBTQ+ families by the U.S. Department of State, the current state of play for recognition of name changes and appropriate gender markers on identity documents, and preparing clients for interviews that seem likely to become increasingly adversarial. This is a “can't miss” panel for anyone representing LGBTQ+ clients in a family-based setting. We will discuss:

- Changes to DOS policy on LGBTQ+ noncitizens
 - Treatment of same-sex couples in countries where same-sex marriage is not legal
 - Issues around trans travel bans
- Current DHS and DOS policy regarding gender markers
- Presenting marriage-based cases where the client may have previously been in an opposite-sex relationship
- Disaster planning: how we can continue serving LGBTQ+ immigrant families if the U.S. Supreme Court overturns *Obergefell*

Stefanie Fisher-Pinkert (DL), Boston, MA

Sonia S. Figueroa, Los Angeles, CA

Connor J. Leighton-Cory, Brooklyn, NY

Sarah B. Pitney, Washington, DC

12:00 pm–1:30 pm

Lunch and Exhibit Hall Break

1:30 pm–2:30 pm

The Interview Tango: Leading, Following, and Knowing When to Step Off

USCIS interviews can often feel like a delicate dance. Panelists on this interactive session will equip practitioners with practical tools and insights for navigating interviews with confidence and professionalism. Through discussion and audience engagement, they also will explore the balance between zealous advocacy and maintaining a productive relationship with USCIS officers. In addition, panelists will provide strategies to protect your clients' interests while upholding ethical standards and preserving credibility in the interview room. They will discuss real-world scenarios, including:

- Handling “Stokes”-style marriage fraud interviews
- Responding to combative or unprofessional officers and inappropriate lines of questioning, including about sexual orientation and gender identity
- Understanding the limits: How hard can you push back?
- Knowing when and how to request a supervisor

Lillian S. Axelrod (DL), Memphis, TN

Leslie A. Holman, AILA Past President, Burlington, VT

Irene Mugambi, AILA Board of Directors, Dallas, TX DEI

Michael R. Jarecki, Chicago, IL

2:30 pm–3:00 pm

Networking Break

3:00 pm–4:00 pm

USCIS Suspects Your Client of Marriage Fraud: Now What?

What do you do when you believe the clients have a bona fide marriage but USCIS disagrees? Experts in marriage fraud cases will share tips and tricks for handling “Stokes”-style interviews, FDNS investigations, notices of intent to deny, and backup plans for when you just can't win. Join us to hear more about:

- Different standards for proving a good faith marriage and for making a finding of marriage fraud
- Preparing your clients for potential “Stokes”-style interviews, including tips on the offices who most often separate couples, the types of couples most likely to face these interviews, and how you can try to avoid them in the first place
- Understanding how FDNS investigations work and preparing your clients for what to do in case FDNS visits their home, neighbors, workplace, or family
- Responding to notices of intent to deny, including ideas for finding evidence when all of the standard documents aren't available

Erica Jacobson Reilly (DL), Washington, D.C.

Rachel Alexa Benedict, Boston, MA

Raymond R. Bolourtchi, St. Louis, MO

Rachelle R. Grand-Pierre, Minneola, FL

4:00 pm–4:30 pm

Networking Break

4:30 pm–5:30 pm

Ethically Practicing Family-Based Immigration in a Hostile Policy Environment

ETHICS

Family-based immigration has always been emotionally charged, but in today's volatile policy landscape, it's also legally and ethically fraught. As policies shift midstream and bureaucratic inertia grinds cases to a halt, practitioners are increasingly forced to provide trauma-informed legal care while also running sustainable practices. Panelists will go beyond legal doctrine to explore what it means to be an effective, ethical, and strategic family immigration attorney when the rules are unclear, the clients are anxious, and the work never seems to end.

- Strategies for advising and counseling clients in a time of legal uncertainty and rapidly changing policies
- Flexible retention agreements and ethical considerations in a volatile time
- Billing structure and practice management to keep up with a shifting landscape and anxious clients that demand more attention than ever

James W. Austin (DL), Kansas City, MO

Manuela Alcocer, San Antonio, TX

Jennifer I. Peyton, Chicago, IL

Patrick Taurel, Bethesda, MD

Government Agency Updates

8:00 am–9:00 am

U.S. Department of State

Steven D. Heller (DL), AILA DOS Liaison Committee Chair, Lewes, East Sussex, UK

Claire S. Pratt, AILA DOS Liaison Committee Vice Chair, San Francisco, CA

9:00 am–9:30 am

Networking Break

9:30 am–10:30 am

U.S. Customs and Border Protection

Nell W. Barker (DL), AILA CBP Liaison Committee Vice Chair, Chicago, IL

Zabrina Reich, AILA CBP Liaison Committee Vice Chair, Buffalo, NY

Mariza Marin, Port Director, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), San Ysidro, CA

**Brittany Simon, Field Office, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), San Diego, CA*

10:30 am–11:00 am

Networking Break

11:00 am–12:00 pm

U.S. Department of Labor

Bob White (DL), AILA DOL Liaison Committee Chair, Schaumburg, IL

Sonal J. Verma, AILA DOL Liaison Committee Vice Chair, Rockville, MD
Edward White, AILA DOL Liaison Committee Vice Chair, Boston, MA

12:00 pm–1:30 pm

Lunch and Exhibit Hall Break

1:30 pm–2:30 pm

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

Kevin Miner (DL), AILA USCIS HQ Liaison Committee Chair, Spring Conference Chair, Atlanta, GA

Lucy G. Cheung, USCIS Operations Committee Chair, New York, NY

Jeanette Kain, AILA USCIS Operations Member, Boston, MA

Vincent W. Lau, AILA USCIS HQ (Benefits Policy) Liaison Committee Vice Chair, Boston, MA

2:30 pm–3:00 pm

Networking Break

3:00 pm–4:00 pm

Executive Office for Immigration Review

Aaron Hall (DL), AILA EOIR Liaison Committee Chair, Aurora, CO

David Wilson, AILA EOIR Liaison Committee Vice Chair, Minneapolis, MN

4:00 pm–4:30 pm

Networking Break

4:30 pm–5:30 pm

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

John Gihon (DL), AILA ICE Liaison Committee Chair, Altamonte Springs, FL

Michelle Edstrom, AILA ICE Liaison Committee Vice Chair, Oklahoma City, OK

Business Strategy Track

8:00 am–9:00 am

EB-5 Regional Center Updates: Preparing for the September 2026 Deadline

The EB-5 Reform and Integrity Act of 2022 (RIA) protects investors from future lapses of the EB-5 program if the I-526E Petition is filed on or before September 30, 2026. With this deadline upcoming, this panel will delve into issues for investors striving to meet the grandfathering deadline. The panel also will discuss the future of the EB-5 Regional Center program, ramifications on Petitions filed after September 30, 2026, and other ongoing changes mandated by the RIA.

- Advising investors on RIA Grandfathering and preparing for the upcoming 2026 deadline
- Cutting edge issues for investors meeting the deadline: installment funding, financing part of the investment, and other new source of funds strategies

- I-526E Petitions filed after September 30, 2026: how to advise new EB-5 investors and what risks may occur with the upcoming sunset of the Program
- Minimum investment amount increases starting January 1, 2027
- Status of the Gold Card Program and understanding the interplay with an EB-5 Regional Center Program extension

Jennifer Hermansky (DL), AILA EB-5 Committee Chair, Philadelphia, PA

H. Ronald Klasko, AILA Past President, Philadelphia, PA

Joey Barnett, AILA EB-5 Committee Vice Chair, Los Angeles, CA

Carolyn S. Lee, Ithaca, NY

9:00 am–9:30 am

Networking Break

9:30 am–10:30 am

Beyond the H-1B: Strategic Use of the J-1 Visa for Employers and Professionals

With H-1B cap limitations, unpredictability in the lottery, and increased scrutiny in adjudications, the J-1 Exchange Visitor Program has emerged as a viable alternative for many employers and foreign nationals. This is particularly the case in education, healthcare, and research. Panelists will explore how practitioners can strategically utilize the J-1 visa category as a temporary or stepping-stone solution when the H-1B is not available.

- J-1 trainee, intern, specialist, and researcher categories
- Comparing J-1 to H-1B: strategic pros and cons
- Selecting a J-1 sponsor and structuring the training/internship/research plan
- Dealing with the §212(e) home residency requirement
- Transitioning from J-1 to H-1B, O-1, or green card
- Policy developments and advocacy

Brian Christopher Schmitt (DL), Westminster, MD

Jennifer Minear, AILA Past President, Charlottesville, VA

Laura J. Mazel, Oakland, CA

Sandra Sheridan Reguerin, Phoenix, AZ

10:30 am–11:00 am

Networking Break

11:00 am–12:00 pm

H-1B at a Crossroads

With sweeping regulatory and policy changes on the horizon, the H-1B program is entering one of its most transformative periods in decades. From the proposed \$100,000 H-1B fee and potential overhaul of the lottery system to the final H-1B modernization rule that took effect January 17, 2025, employers, universities, and practitioners must quickly adapt. Our experts will unpack these developments, analyze their legal and practical implications, and discuss strategies for maintaining compliance, workforce continuity, and competitiveness in an increasingly restrictive environment.

- The \$100,000 H-1B fee proposal: assessing potential legal challenges, cost impacts, and implications for startups, nonprofits, and academia
- Lottery reform and weighted selection: exploring proposed wage-based or merit-based selection models and their impact on fairness and accessibility
- 2025 H-1B final rule implementation: understanding key regulatory updates, including the new Form I-129, specialty occupation standards, and enhanced compliance authority
- Strategic employer responses: practical steps for budgeting, compliance readiness, and long-term workforce planning under new H-1B realities

Magaly Rojas Cheng (DL), Boston, MA

William Russell Hummel, Annual Conference Committee, Charlotte, NC

Bushra Malik, Troy, MI

Nikki Esposito Whetstone, Cranberry Twp, PA

12:00 pm–1:30 pm

Lunch and Exhibit Hall Break

1:30 pm–2:30 pm

Beyond Kazarian and Dhanasar: Winning Strategies in EB-1 and EB-2 NIWs

As USCIS continues to tighten scrutiny over EB-1 and NIW petitions, practitioners face increasingly nuanced adjudications that demand both strategic storytelling and robust evidentiary frameworks. Panelists will explore current trends, RFE patterns, and advanced techniques for building persuasive records, especially for clients in emerging or interdisciplinary fields. They also will examine case strategy, identify evidentiary gaps, and streamline drafting from start to finish.

- Evolving standards in EB-1A/EB-1B, and NIW adjudications: redefining “extraordinary,” “outstanding,” and “national importance”
- Crafting compelling narratives and evidentiary records under *Kazarian* and *Dhanasar* frameworks
- Practical strategies for strengthening expert letters, professional recognition, and impact evidence
- Special considerations for nontraditional and entrepreneurial fields: tech, social media, AI, and biotech
- Common RFE pitfalls and how to overcome them through narrative framing and expert testimony

Ellen Freeman (DL), AILA Business Section Steering Committee Chair, Pittsburgh, PA

Andrea M. Canona, Miami, FL

Giedre Stasiunaite, Miami, FL

Miki Matrician, Boston, MA

2:30 pm–3:00 pm

Networking Break

3:00 pm–4:00 pm

Harnessing the H-2B Visa Program to Solve Labor Shortages

The H-2B visa program is a critical tool for addressing labor shortages in seasonal and temporary industries. Panelists will share proven strategies for navigating the legal and procedural challenges of the H-2B program, helping attorneys build or expand their H-2B practice areas while ensuring compliance and client success.

- Understanding the role of H-2B visas in mitigating labor shortages
- Issue spotting and common pitfalls in H-2B cases
- Practical strategies for managing high-volume H-2B caseloads efficiently
- How to advise clients on compliance and audit readiness
- Business development tips for immigration attorneys to grow their H-2B practice
- Understanding the supplemental lotteries

Ashley Foret Dees (DL), Annual Conference Committee, Houston, TX

Alexander George Dahlin Carl, Los Angeles, CA

Jennifer H. Estrella, Miami, FL

Loan T. Huynh, Minneapolis, MN

4:00 pm–4:30 pm

Networking Break

Events

7:00 pm–9:30 pm

The American Immigration Council’s Immigration Impact Awards (*separate ticket required*)

Saturday, June 20, 2026

Fundamentals

8:00 am–9:00 am

PERM II: Preparing for the I-140

A successful PERM requires more than meeting U.S. Department of Labor requirements, it also must support a strong I-140 petition. In this session, panelists will explain how to document the beneficiary’s qualifications and the employer’s ability to pay from the outset, and how to identify audit triggers.

- Documenting education and establishing U.S. degree equivalency
- Documenting experience and when prior employment with the petitioner may count
- Employer’s ability to pay: proof at filing and likelihood of continued ability to pay
- Identify audit flags: random vs. triggered and how to identify risks
- Best practices to ensure the PERM supports approval of the subsequent I-140

Christopher M. Barnett (DL), Dallas, TX

Andrew W. Shackelford, Annual Conference Committee Special Sessions Track Chair, Phoenix, AZ

Margaret Holland Sparages, Boston, MA

Hudaidah Bhimdi, Chantilly, VA

9:00 am–9:15 am

Networking Break

9:15 am–10:15 am

Removal I: Essentials of Immigration Court Practice

Representing clients in removal proceedings requires skill, innovation, and perseverance. Panelists in Part I of this two-part series will provide you with the basic essentials you need to be an effective litigator in immigration court.

- The notice to appear (NTA): content, service, and filing
- Pleading, challenging allegations, and understanding burdens of proof
- Overview of common forms of relief
- Procedures and practice requirements under the Immigration Court Practice Manual
- Motions in immigration court

Cynthia Mazariegos Fernandez (DL), Annual Conference Committee, Chicago, IL

Eszter K. Bardi, AILA Board of Directors, Decatur, GA

Andrea Sáenz, New York, NY

Julia Veronica Torres, San Diego, CA

10:15 am–10:45 am

Networking Break

10:45 am–11:45 am

Removal II: Immigration Court Procedure

Now that the basics have been covered, panelists will focus on the more procedural side of representing clients in removal proceedings. They will explain how to prepare filings, organize evidence, and get clients ready for individual hearings, with practical tips for effective advocacy in immigration court.

- Filings with the immigration court: motions, applications, and evidence
- The importance of a prehearing brief
- Individual hearings: what to expect and quick tips for preparing clients, cases, and witnesses
- Preserving issues for appeal

Cheryl David (DL), New York, NY

Noemy Cruz, AILA Board of Directors, San Diego, CA

Carla Espinoza, Aurora, IL

Leah L. Chavarria, San Diego, CA

11:45 am–12:45 pm

Lunch Break

12:45 pm–1:45 pm

Asylum I: Overview

In this introduction to asylum law, panelists will provide an overview of the asylum process and discuss key terms, restrictions, and other basics for new practitioners. They will discuss the differences between affirmative and defensive asylum applications, seeking asylum at the border, and preparation for the asylum interview.

- Basics of eligibility for asylum
- How, where, and when to apply for asylum: affirmative, defensive, port of entry
- Grounds of ineligibility and statutory bars
- The asylum interview

Tammy Lin (DL), San Diego, CA

Parastoo Golesorkhi Zahedi, AILA Board of Directors, Vienna, VA

Lauren McClure, Chicago, IL

Ismail Shahtakhtinski, Fairfax, VA

1:45 pm–2:00 pm

Networking Break

2:00 pm–3:00 pm

Asylum II: Mechanics of an Asylum Application

Panelists will build upon the information discussed in Asylum I to provide new practitioners with a better understanding of the asylum process and the most important key concepts.

- Particular Social Groups (PSGs)
- Credible fear and reasonable fear interviews: when they apply and what they mean for clients
- The Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) and special considerations for children
- Working with clients: preparing them for interviews

Ban Al-Wardi (DL), Rolling Hills, CA

Lindsey Gauzza, New York, NY

Monica Mananzan, Washington, D.C.

David Secor, Washington, D.C.

Business

8:00 am–9:00 am

Port Pressure and Scrutiny: Latest Trends in CBP and Visa Adjudications

As immigration enforcement intensifies under a renewed Trump Administration, CBP and consular officers are flexing greater discretion at ports of entry and abroad. Panelists on this session will provide timely insight into evolving adjudication patterns, secondary inspection risks, and how practitioners can prepare clients for heightened scrutiny.

- Emerging trends in CBP secondary inspections, device searches, expedited removals, and visa cancellations at the border
- Visa application challenges at consulates: heightened INA §221(g) delays, §214(b)/§212(a) denials, and public charge scrutiny

- Documenting “nonimmigrant intent” and preemptively addressing travel history, status maintenance, and social media disclosures
- Best practices for preparing clients with sensitive case histories or prior denials for visa appointments and travel
- Strategies for post-denial or post-expedited removal recovery, including motions to review, reapplications, and waivers

Jessica Dawn Jensen (DL), AILA Board of Directors, Winnipeg, Canada

Aaron Karnell, Livingston, NJ

Matt Mauntel-Medici, Des Moines, IA

Shavit Yarden, New York, NY

9:00 am–9:15 am

Networking Break

9:15 am–10:15 am

Strategic Responses to USCIS Employment-Based Denials

When USCIS denies an employment-based petition, practitioners must quickly assess not only what went wrong, but what options remain—and which path offers the best chance of success. This intermediate-to-advanced panel will examine the full range of legal, procedural, and strategic considerations when responding to denials in employment-based filings. Panelists will compare the risks and benefits of motions, appeals, refilings, and litigation, including key case law updates and venue insights for federal court challenges.

- Strategic triage: when refiling is more effective than appealing and how to strengthen the refile
- Filing a motion to reopen or reconsider vs. pursuing an AAO appeal: timing, evidentiary standards, and success rates
- Using mandamus or declaratory judgment actions to address unreasonable delay or legal error, and weighing venue
- Understanding the impact of RFEs, NOIDs, and denial language on your response strategy
- Ethical considerations when pursuing litigation or filing a materially revised reapplication

Anis N. Saleh (DL), Coral Gables, FL

Eleanor Pelta, AILA Past President/Bylaws Committee Chair, Washington, D.C.

Brian Scott Green, AILA Benefits Litigation Committee Chair, Denver, CO

10:15 am–10:45 am

Networking Break

10:45 am–11:45 am

Form I-9 and E-Verify: Avoiding Compliance Pitfalls and Discrimination Liability

In an era of increased worksite enforcement and overlapping federal and state mandates, employers are facing greater scrutiny of their Form I-9 and E-Verify compliance practices. Panelists on this advanced panel will guide attorneys through the current

enforcement landscape—including ICE audits, DOJ Immigrant and Employee Rights (IER) investigations, and emerging state-level enforcement trends. Panelists also will discuss how well-intentioned sponsorship and hiring practices can trigger liability under anti-discrimination laws, including INA §1324b and 42 USC §1981.

- Form I-9 and E-Verify inspections and investigations: what to expect from ICE, DHS, and state agencies
- Discrimination risks tied to sponsorship decisions, PERM recruitment, LCA postings, and onboarding practices
- Best practices for navigating IER investigations involving unfair documentary practices, over-documentation, and citizenship status discrimination
- Key takeaways from recent §1324b and §1981 cases: how employers get in trouble and how to keep them out
- How federal contractor obligations, state E-Verify mandates, and technology platforms (ATS, onboarding software) can create risk or reinforce compliance

Punam Singh Rogers (DL), Annual Conference Committee, Boston, MA

John Walter Mazzeo, AILA Verification & Documentation Liaison Committee Vice Chair, Warminster, PA

Mary E. Pivec, Woodbridge, VA

Julie Emerick, Chicago, IL

11:45 am–12:45 pm

Lunch Break

12:45 pm–1:45 pm

Government Knocking: Preparing for FDNS, DOL, and ICE Visits

Unannounced visits and audits by federal agencies—including USCIS’s Fraud Detection and National Security (FDNS) unit, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)—are becoming increasingly common across all employer-sponsored visa categories. From H-1B and L-1 site visits to I-9 inspections and wage audits, employers face heightened scrutiny and potential exposure if caught unprepared. Panelists will equip practitioners with the tools to guide clients through pre-visit preparation, onsite response, and post-enforcement compliance, with an emphasis on minimizing business disruption and mitigating risk.

- What triggers FDNS, DOL, and ICE site visits, and how these agencies coordinate information
- How to proactively prepare HR, managers, and foreign nationals for unannounced visits
- Common red flags: discrepancies in job duties, supervision, work location, or wage documentation
- Managing DOL investigations and wage/hour site visits, including investigator access and record requests
- Best practices during enforcement actions: what to say (and not say), who should respond, and immediate containment steps, internal audits, and corrective actions

Nicole A. Kersey (DL), St. Petersburg, FL

Bruce E. Buchanan, AILA Author, The I-9 and E-Verify Handbook: A Guide to Employment Verification and Compliance, 2nd ed., Nashville, TN

Allen Orr, AILA Past President, Washington, D.C.

Samantha Danielle Wolfe, Denver, CO

1:45 pm–2:00 pm

Networking Break

2:00 pm–3:00 pm

Evolving or Regressing? What Agency Guidance Really Means in 2026

Practitioners often rely on FAQs and guidance that may not be reliable or binding.

Panelists will dissect how to evaluate and use government guidance effectively.

- The hierarchy of authority: policy manual vs. memo vs. FAQ vs. website update vs. midnight tweet
- How to identify obsolete or internally inconsistent guidance
- When to follow guidance and when to challenge it
- How to hold agencies accountable (if we even can anymore)
- Lessons from recent rescissions, reversals, and regulatory whiplash

Stacy Shore (DL), Silver Spring, MD

William A. Stock, AILA Past President, Philadelphia, PA

Scott Gorski, AILA Board of Directors, New York, NY

Susan Waller Ramos, Phoenix, AZ

Removal

8:00 am–9:00 am

Understanding and Challenging Third-Country Removals

The government's unprecedented expansion of removing noncitizens to nations other than a country of origin raises urgent legal, constitutional, and human rights questions.

Panelists will prepare practitioners to anticipate high-risk clients and how to respond effectively when the government attempts such a removal. Topics include:

- Who is at risk for a third-country removal and current legal frameworks
- Current government trends on third-country removals, including chain refoulement and other human rights violations
- Strategies to combat third-country removals through litigation, advocacy, and international human rights mechanisms

Jeremy L. McKinney (DL), AILA Past President/Governance Committee Vice Chair, Greensboro, NC

Rebecca Sharpless, Coral Gables, FL

Trina Realmuto, Brookline, MA

Simon Y. Sandoval-Moshenberg, Fairfax, VA

Sandra Grossman, Bethesda, MD

9:00 am–9:15 am

Networking Break

9:15 am–10:15 am

Analyzing Criminal Convictions for Immigration Consequences

Lawyering, especially defending, is in the details. Winning defensive cases often requires deploying all analytical tools, to win on the law rather than on the facts. Perhaps no aspect of law practice is more detail oriented—and fertile—than shaping which criminal convictions count for immigration purposes. Panelists will begin with a review of the primary foundational cases for determining which convictions “count,” and then they will survey recent cases from the BIA and federal courts.

- Which convictions count: vacatur, sentence modifications; distinguishing diversionary programs and deferred adjudication; juvenile delinquencies and youthful offenses
- Analyzing immigration consequences of a conviction: a review of categorical, modified categorical, and circumstance-specific approaches
- Overview of significant recent caselaw construing aggravated felonies, crimes involving moral turpitude, offenses “relating to a controlled substance,” and more

Matthew H. Green (DL), Tucson, AZ

Mary E. Kramer, AILA Author, Immigration Consequences of Criminal Activity: A Guide to Representing Foreign-Born Defendants, 10th ed., Miami, FL

Cory Forman, AILA Standing Committee on Political Engagement (SCOPE) Co-Chair, New York, NY

Amanda Waterhouse, AILA Removal Defense Section Steering Committee Chair, Houston, TX

Lucia Ornelas, Training & Legal Support Attorney, American Immigration Council, Washington, D.C.

10:15 am–10:45 am

Networking Break

10:45 am–11:45 am

Strategies to Avoid Expedited Removal

Who would have thought that keeping clients in proceeding was safer? With the unprecedented expansion of expedited removal (ER), millions of noncitizens are now at risk of removal from the United States without due process. Panelists will break down this complex area of the law, outlining who is (and who isn't) subject to expedited removal, how it impacts noncitizens' rights to due process and liberty interests, and how to challenge the government's application of ER to our clients. Discussion will include:

- Review of the history and current legal framework of expedited removal: Who does it really apply to?
- Impact of application of ER on custody status and eligibility for release and recent case law
- How to challenge DHS attempts to subject those in removal proceedings to expedited removal and EOIR complicity
- Warning: asylum cases and prepermission of proceedings as another way for DHS to achieve dismissal and ER

- When your client is trapped in custody: how to request and navigate the credible and reasonable fear process

Kristin Macleod-Ball (DL), Brookline, MA

Taylor Levy, San Francisco, CA

Suchita Mathur, Washington, D.C.

11:45 am–12:45 pm

Lunch Break

12:45 pm–1:45 pm

Parade of Horribles: Federal Statutes that Punish Immigration Status Violations

The current administration is revisiting little-used statutory and regulatory provisions in ways that are not immigrant-friendly. Panelists will review several trends in enforcement that practitioners will need to be aware of when advising clients, including preparing for efforts to target nonprofits, employers, and even immigration attorneys.

- Commonly prosecuted federal crimes, such as smuggling, unlawful entry and re-entry cases.
- “ Sleeper ” statutes that may be used more often, such as harboring, failure to register/change address/carry LPR card
- DOJ’s attempts to expand the reach of unlawful entry (8 USC §1325) and harboring (8 USC §1324) both in scope and in who is prosecuted
- Civil penalties for failure to depart and how to combat them

Emma D. Wells (DL), Peoria, AZ

Kevin A. Gregg, Coral Gables, FL

Meghann E. LaFountain, Middletown, CT

Michelle Lapointe, Legal Director, American Immigration Council, Washington, D.C.

Family

8:00 am–9:00 am

Citizenship by Law or Legacy

Panelists will explore the complex and often misunderstood legal frameworks surrounding U.S. citizenship claims outside of naturalization. They also will discuss the distinctions between birthright citizenship, citizenship acquired at birth through U.S. citizen parents, and citizenship derived through the naturalization of a parent.

- Identifying and evaluating derived and acquired citizenship claims
- Addressing common pitfalls, including gaps in physical presence or documentation
- Advocating for clients asserting U.S. citizenship in removal proceedings or on passport applications
- Strategies for cases involving amended or delayed birth certificates
- Current state of Executive Order 14160, “Protecting the Meaning and Value of American Citizenship”

Alison Kamhi (DL), VAWA, Us, and Ts Committee Vice Chair, San Francisco, CA

Amy Lenhert, Annual Conference Committee, Los Angeles, CA

Breanna Cary, Edmond, OK
Scott C. Titshaw, Macon, GA

9:00 am–9:15 am

Networking Break

9:15 am–10:15 am

Family Reunification After Deportation

Reuniting families after removal requires navigating complex bars to reentry and consular procedures. Panelists will provide guidance on consequences of removal (whether enforced or incentivized), waivers, and strategic alternatives.

- Eligibility for I-212 post-deportation
- Dual filings (I-212 + I-130) and coordination tips
- Other options: humanitarian parole or nonimmigrant visas with waivers
- Long-term planning for families separated by removal

Paul O'Dwyer (DL), New York, NY

Teresa A. Coles-Davila, San Antonio, TX

Shobhana Kasturi, Naperville, IL

Gabriela Lopez, Oakland, CA

10:15 am–10:45 am

Networking Break

10:45 am–11:45 am

Complex Age-Out Issues and Derivative Child Eligibility

The U.S. Supreme Court rightly called provisions of the Child Status Protection Act (CSPA) “through and through perplexing.” Some 23 years after its passage, courts, agencies, and practitioners alike continue to grapple with its complexities. Panelists on this advanced session will delve into the more intricate aspects of the CSPA, providing you with insights and tools to analyze age-out issues and preserve derivative eligibility for your clients.

- Strategies for avoiding age-out in F2A and derivative visa cases
- Interpretation of the “sought to acquire” clause under the CSPA
- Impact of parent’s naturalization
- CSPA in other than I-130 situations: humanitarian applications
- Impact of country-specific Visa Bulletin fluctuations and National Visa Center delays

Kathleen Elizabeth Irish (DL), AILA Family Section Steering Committee Chair, Kansas City, MO

Kelli E. Gavin, Dallas, TX

Andrea Chavarria, Dallas, TX

11:45 am–12:45 pm

Lunch Break

12:45 pm–1:45 pm

Complex Affidavits of Support

Panelists on this intermediate-to-advanced session will address complex issues surrounding the I-864 Affidavit of Support, including the use of assets to meet income requirements and best practices when working with joint sponsors and preparing the I-864A. They will highlight the importance of complete tax return submissions and common pitfalls that lead to RFEs and denials. Panelists also will discuss how public charge concerns may intersect with I-864 adjudications and provide strategies for avoiding negative outcomes.

- Calculating and documenting assets effectively
- Leveraging 40 quarters of work history
- Joint sponsors: practical and ethical advice to clients and to joint sponsors
- Joint sponsor vs. household member
- Responding to public charge scrutiny

Anthony Drago Jr. (DL), Boston, MA

Ben Loveman, San Francisco, CA

Steven Thal, Minnetonka, MN

1:45 pm–2:00 pm

Networking Break

2:00 pm–3:00 pm

Targeted Attacks Against Child Victims: Combating Allegations of Fraud

On July 25, 2025, USCIS released a lengthy report alleging extensive fraud within the Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) program, specifically regarding issues heavily litigated during the prior administration including unlawful entry, percentage of applicants aged 18-20, and neglect-only or forced labor findings. These shifts show a clear desire to claw back protections to pre-2008 congressional amendments. Immigrant youth are further at risk, as the administration has begun sending “self-deportation” letters to children aged 14 to 17, and the J.O.P. v. DHS settlement agreement has sunset. Panelists will address:

- Current challenges to SIJS definitions, including enhanced risks to children now aged 18 to 20
- Risks for children encountered at their homes or who receive letters to “deport,” the end of deferred action, and increased detention
- Broad attacks on those who entered without inspection (“EWI”) despite designation as “Unaccompanied Alien Child”
- Asylum claims in the wake of J.O.P. sunset
- Obtaining more robust predicate orders, and building a stronger I-360 package

Emily Robinson (DL), Annual Conference Committee, Los Angeles, CA

Jean Pierre Espinoza, Lakeland, FL

Tiffany E. Markee, San Diego, CA

Marie Silver, Children's Protection Project, NIJC, Chicago, IL

Special Sessions

8:00 am–9:00 am

Reacting to Mistakes with Emotional Intelligence **WELLNESS**

As attorneys, we are human, and so, like everyone else on Earth, we make mistakes. But how do we react to these errors, both individually and/or within our team? Panelists will explore how to handle mistakes with emotional intelligence, offering strategies to respond compassionately and constructively to those mistakes, whether addressing them ourselves, with clients, with colleagues, or within a larger team.

- What happens in my mind and body when I make a mistake?
- Strategies to react compassionately and constructively when a team member makes a mistake
- Addressing mistakes with clients

Kenneth Craig Dobson (DL), AILA Well-Being Committee Chair, New York, NY

Sarah Rice Sanger, Annual Conference Committee, Toronto, ON

David Asser, Denver, CO

Sara Marie Mailander, Boston, MA

9:00 am–9:15 am

Networking Break

9:15 am–10:15 am

Next-Gen Immigration Operations: From Intake Bots to Approval Forecasts **TECHNOLOGY**

On the operational side, AI now acts as an invisible project manager: case-management suites auto-populate I-130s, PERMs, and H-1Bs, flag deadlines, and route bilingual chatbots to qualify new leads, freeing attorneys for strategic work. Encrypted client portals and virtual-paralegal dashboards enable cross-border collaboration without compromising confidentiality or supervisory duties. Predictive analytics track Visa Bulletin shifts and approval patterns, arming firms with data to adjust strategy before policies change. Panelists will map the full technology stack that powers a modern business– and family-immigration practice, from intake to insight.

- Using immigration case management technology programs for integration to automate deadlines, billing, and forms
- AI-enhanced client intake and communication: how Chatbots and AI voice agents handle multilingual client screening, eligibility checks, appointment scheduling, and data capture around the clock, improving responsiveness and reducing manual burden
- Secure virtual collaboration
- Using AI-driven analytics to forecast approval trends, track policy changes, and predict case outcomes

Amie D. Miller (DL), San Francisco, CA

Joo Young Seo, Toronto, ON

Amélie Sophie Vavrovsky, Stanford, CA

10:15 am–10:45 am

Networking Break

10:45 am–11:45 am

Protecting and Defending Your Client – and Yourself!

As the aggressive enforcement tactics of the current Administration continue to evolve and unfold, attorneys must be prepared to protect their personal safety and defend themselves against allegations of fraud, obstruction of justice, and more effectively advocating for their clients. Join this panel of AILA experts to explore these complex topics and walk away better prepared to protect yourself while you protect your clients.

- Preparing and filing documentation competently and ethically
- Defending against disciplinary and criminal complaints
- Considerations in your intake and case evaluation checklists
- Tips for lowering the temperature and protecting yourself when engaging with aggressive immigration or law enforcement personnel
- Protecting yourself during hostile interactions

Jerome G. Grzeca (DL), AILA Rule of Law Task Force Chair, Milwaukee, WI

Kathleen Campbell Walker, AILA Past President/AILA Rule of Law Task Force Vice Chair, El Paso, TX

Cyrus D. Mehta, AILA Law Journal Editorial Board Chair, New York, NY

11:45 am–12:45 pm

Lunch Break

12:45 pm–1:45 pm

From Law Degree to LawGPT: Building Your Own Future AI Co-Counsel

TECHNOLOGY

Generative AI has evolved into a bespoke co-counsel: immigration lawyers can spin up custom GPTs that parse regulations, link securely to firm knowledge bases through OpenAI Connectors, and delegate browser or spreadsheet tasks to Agent Mode—all without writing code. These capabilities collapse hours of drafting into minutes, letting attorneys assemble visa petitions and exhibits while preserving competence and confidentiality under ABA Model Rules 1.1 and 1.6. Panelists will unpack the potential of this advanced toolkit, demonstrating prompt-engineering, workflow audits, and guardrails that turn cutting-edge automation into ethically sound advocacy.

- Ethical framework and competence: exploring ethical guardrails under ABA Model Rule 1.1 (competence) and 1.6 (confidentiality)
- Prompt-building with legal expertise: how to quickly leverage your law training to craft precise, context-rich prompts
- Prompt-engineered custom generative pre-trained transformers (GPTs) and real-time case synthesis: building tailored GPT tools
- Secure connectors and agent mode in team environments: how ChatGPT's Connectors and newly released agent mode enable secure, supervised retrieval and processing of client files, research, and briefs in real time

- Drafting an AI policy for your firm

James Chesser (DL), Fountain Inn, SC

Nadine Heitz, Lake Worth, FL

Ron Matten, West Hollywood, CA

Tina Zedginidze, San Francisco, CA

1:45 pm–2:00 pm

Networking Break

2:00 pm–3:00 pm

Duty of Care and Tools for Remaining Healthy in the Current Regulatory Climate **WELLNESS**

We have a responsibility to maintain our physical and mental health to meet our ethical responsibilities and be effective. The practice of law is a notoriously stressful occupation. Practitioners must be proactive in prioritizing their health and well-being. Panelists will offer strategies for dealing with changes brought on by the new administration, setting realistic expectations, developing emotional intelligence, handling high-pressure demands, and aligning client goals with achievable outcomes.

- Recognizing the signs of anxiety
- The impact stress can have on the body and the mind and understanding when to seek help
- Strategies for setting realistic client expectations and communicating effectively in the face of high-pressure demands or challenges
- Developing resilience and emotional intelligence in interactions with your clients and staff

Mary M. O'Leary (DL), Petoskey, MI

Lynn Calder, Annual Conference Committee, Raleigh, NC

Jack Jrada, New York, NY

Teodora D. Purcell, San Diego, CA

Humanitarian

8:00 am–9:00 am

Advanced VAWA Practice

Scrutiny of VAWA petitions has increased over the years, culminating in many recent and significant changes to USCIS adjudication policies. USCIS is also more aggressive than ever in accusations of fraud on the part of applicants and their attorneys. Panelists will analyze these changes and other complex issues that arise in VAWA petitions and address how best to handle them.

- New interview standard: concerns and strategies
- The new targets: abused parents
- Building a strong record for both the client and the attorney in a new fraud-focused environment
- Bona fide determinations: current status of their effect on removal enforcement
- Mental health evaluations: value vs. ethical concerns

Cynthia Lucas (DL), Pasadena, CA
Tracie L. Morgan, Annual Conference Committee, Atlanta, GA
Shelly San Martin, East Hartford, CT
Rebecca Eissenova, Acushnet, MA

9:00 am–9:15 am

Networking Break

9:15 am–10:15 am

Making Us and Ts Work for You

Panelists on this advanced session will explore complex and evolving issues in U and T nonimmigrant status, focusing on who may be eligible. They will address the increasingly nuanced landscape of indirect and bystander victim claims, including strategies for establishing harm and nexus to the crime. Experts will advise on how to think about the definition of trafficking, to ensure we explore all viable options for clients. They also will present strategies in response to USCIS policy and adjudication trends concerning bona fide determinations, the tension between state and federal definitions of qualifying crimes, and more.

- Building strong cases for bystander and indirect victims
- Effective approaches in screening for a T visa
- Strategies to a denial to certify
- USCIS policy and adjudication trends

Cecelia F. Levin (DL), Silver Spring, MD
Bethany T. Hoffmann, Rockford, IL
Deborah Mas Cabrera, Harlingen, TX

10:15 am–10:45 am

Networking Break

10:45 am–11:45 am

CAT: What Else is There When Asylum and Withholding of Removal are Barred?

Restrictive interpretations of the law and harsh judgments of the facts are compromising refugees' eligibility for protection from persecution and torture in their home countries. Panelists will examine the critical factual and legal elements of protection under the Convention Against Torture (CAT), and the procedural factors and recent case law that can stand between your clients and relief.

- Standards for CAT, and how to measure what is “more likely than not”
- Government action, acquiescence, and willful blindness in *Matter of A-A-R-*, *Matter of M-S-I-*, and other cases
- No nexus requirement for CAT: How does motive fit in under *Matter of R-A-F-*, or does it?
- Particularized risk of torture and evidence to prove it: avoiding the pitfalls of *Matter of A-A-F-V-*

Gregory Fay (DL), AILA Asylum and Refugee Committee Chair, Tempe, AZ
Victoria Neilson, New York, NY

Martin Rosenbluth, Lumpkin, GA
Kathryn Weber, Chicago, IL

11:45 am–12:45 pm

Lunch Break

12:45 pm–1:45 pm

Asylum: Defining and Refining Political Opinion and Particular Social Groups

Federal courts and particularly the BIA continue to narrow the cognizability of particular social groups. Framing asylum claims as based on political opinion, as well as formulating acceptable PSGs, are increasingly important skills. Panelists will review the current state of the law and discuss:

- Recent case law and EOIR policy memoranda narrowing the application of political opinion and limiting PSGs
- Anti-gang activity and gender-based claims both in the context of political opinion and PSGs
- The importance of distinguishing your case, building a record pre-trial, and avoiding pretermission
- Avoiding conflation of PSG and nexus

Ashley Hamill (DL), Tallahassee, FL

Dree K. Collopy, AILA Author, AILA's Asylum Primer: A Practical Guide to U.S.

Asylum Law and Procedure, 9th ed., Washington, DC

Blaine M. Bookey, San Francisco, CA

Gianna Borroto, Bethesda, MD

1:45 pm–2:00 pm

Networking Break

2:00 pm–3:00 pm

TRIG and Other Criminal Bars to Asylum

Asylum seekers exploited by gangs, cartels, and other criminal groups now face the challenge of being barred from asylum for “engaging in terrorist activities” or “providing material support” to a terrorist organization due to the very persecution they suffered. Join this panel to discuss how the recent designations of Tier 1 terrorist organizations impact asylum seekers, the exemption process, and other criminal bars to asylum.

- Deep dive into the definition and application of membership in terrorist organization, terrorist activity, and material support
- Discussion of other criminal bars
 - Persecutor bar
 - Particularly serious crime bar
 - Serious non-political crime outside the U.S. bar

Ilana Greenstein (DL), Boston, MA

Michael DeRienzo, Sudbury, MA

Yliana Johansen-Mendez, Los Angeles, CA

Jay Gairson, Seattle, WA

Updated 04/24/2026

Rebekah Wolf, American Immigration Council, Washington, D.C.

Events

3:30 pm–10:00 pm

Saturday Night Party at the San Diego Zoo (*separate ticket required*)

**Please note all sessions and events may be subject to change without notice.*