



AMERICAN
IMMIGRATION
LAWYERS
ASSOCIATION

39th Annual AILA California Chapters Conference and Webcast

Join AILA's Northern California Chapter in beautiful San Francisco for three dynamic days of cutting-edge immigration law programming, practical strategies, and meaningful connection. The 39th Annual AILA California Chapters Conference and Webcast will explore the latest developments and emerging trends across litigation, business, and removal practice. Expert faculty will lead engaging sessions on habeas, removal defense strategies, PERM, media training, representing clients in crisis, and more. Attendees also will have opportunities to earn specialized CLE credits in ethics, competence, and elimination of bias. We look forward to seeing you in San Francisco this November!

Note: Digital recordings of each session will be provided to all conference registrants. This gives attendees the ability to watch (or rewatch) any panels presented during the live conference.

November 5–7, 2026

Hyatt Regency Downtown

San Francisco, CA

All times listed on the program are Pacific Time (PT)

Note: All sessions and events are subject to change without notice.

*- All events, sessions, and conference
materials are subject to change*

Thursday, November 5, 2026

- 3:00 pm–3:05 pm Welcome and Greetings
Tami V. Castillo, Conference Committee Chair, Sacramento, CA
- 3:05 pm–4:05 pm **Updates from Regional DOL Wage and Hour Officers**
This interactive panel with DOL Wage and Hour and U/T visa officers will provide an opportunity for attendees to ask questions about the latest developments in DOL Wage and Hour enforcement trends, U and T visas, and H-1B, H-2A/B enforcement.
- Hot Topics
 - U and T visas
 - H-2A and H-2B visas
 - H-1B and H-2A enforcement
- 4:05 pm–4:35 pm Networking Break
- 4:35 pm–5:35 pm **Sustaining the Advocate: Wellness, Resilience, and Preventing Burnout in Challenging Times (Competence)**
Panelists will share practical strategies for building sustainable immigration practices while maintaining effective, competent advocacy. They will discuss:
- Recognizing burnout, compassion fatigue, unhealthy coping, substance use, and their impact on competence
 - Setting boundaries for caseloads, availability, and client expectations
 - Managing urgent deadlines, policy shifts, and heavy workloads
 - Creating sustainable practices and supporting morale through mentorship and wellness-centered leadership
 - Building resilience to improve judgment and reduce errors
- 5:35 pm–6:00 pm Networking Break
- 6:00 pm–6:10 pm **Special Remarks (Not CLE Eligible)**
The Living Legacy of Birthright Citizenship: Remarks from special guest, Norman W.K. Wong, descendant of Wong Kim Ark
- 6:10 pm–6:15 pm Break

- All events, sessions, and conference materials are subject to change

6:15 pm–7:15 pm

Hot Topics: Election Results and What's Next

Join us just two days after the November 3 midterms to discuss the election results, the potential implications for practitioners, and the evolving immigration landscape. Panelists will provide the latest updates, trends, and on-the-ground developments to help practitioners navigate what may lie ahead.

- What do the results mean for immigration policy and practitioners?
- Updates on AILA's advocacy efforts, the new Congress, and executive branch priorities

Friday, November 6, 2026

Removal/Family Track

8:00 am–9:00 am

Winning Bond in 2026: Advanced Strategies for Release from Immigration Detention

With enforcement priorities intensifying, securing release from detention demands a sharper command of bond strategy. Panelists will offer practical, up-to-date strategies for winning bond hearings, addressing government arguments, and building persuasive records for release.

- Current standards for bond eligibility under INA §236(a) and challenging DHS custody determinations
- Proving lack of danger and flight risk, including criminal history issues and rehabilitation evidence
- Bond strategies for asylum seekers and long-term residents, plus practice tips for preparing clients and witnesses
- BIA appeals, motions for redetermination, and trends
- Alternative pathways to release for survivor clients (U, T, and VAWA petitioners), including the latest developments in *ICWC v. Noem* and similar litigation

9:00 am–9:30 am

Networking Break

9:30 am–10:30 am

Navigating the Storm: Removal Defense Strategies in an Increasingly Hostile Legal Landscape

As enforcement priorities shift and appellate options narrow, practitioners must adapt litigation strategies to protect clients facing removal. Panelists will examine:

- Recent trends from the immigration courts, the BIA, and federal courts
- Practical tips on preserving issues for appeal
- Strategies for developing strong evidentiary records, including the effective use of expert witnesses
- Creative avenues of relief
- Managing difficult cases in a rapidly changing environment

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

11:00 am–12:00 pm **Confronting Bias in Immigration Adjudication: Recognition, Documentation, and Advocacy (Elimination of Bias)**

Experts will discuss how implicit and systemic bias can affect immigration adjudication. They also will share strategies for documenting and preserving claims when bias impacts a client's case. Topics include:

- Recognizing implicit and systemic bias in immigration adjudication
 - How bias can influence credibility assessments, demeanor-based findings, and case outcomes
- Recent federal court decisions and litigation efforts confronting bias in EOIR
- Utilizing collaborative AILA resources to document adjudicator bias and preserve systemic claims
- Lessons learned from motions seeking a new immigration judge and other remedial protections
- Laying the groundwork for future impact litigation and long-term reforms toward a fair and impartial adjudicatory system

12:00 pm–1:00 pm **Lunch Break**

1:00 pm–2:00 pm **Adjustment of Status Under Heightened Scrutiny: Discretion, Interviews, and Avoiding Denials**

Adjustment of status is no longer simply a question of statutory eligibility. Panelists will explore the legal foundations of applications before USCIS, the impact of recent USCIS guidance, practical implications for employment- and family-based applicants, emerging interview and adjudication trends, and strategies for addressing inadmissibility and discretionary concerns before they become obstacles to approval.

- Evolving discretionary framework, including USCIS PM 602-0199 and the shift from *Matter of Arai* to *Matter of Blas*
- Building a strong discretionary record and spotting interview red flags
- Preparing clients for heightened scrutiny and changing USCIS interview and documentation expectations
- Responding to issues that arise during or after the interview, including RFEs, delays, fraud concerns, and enforcement risks
- Litigation risks, recent adjudication lessons, and future challenges

2:00 pm–2:30 pm Networking Break

2:30 pm–3:30 pm **When Affirmative Cases Turn Risky: Denials, Enforcement Exposure, and Post-Denial Strategy**

As affirmative petition denials rise, practitioners must manage risk from pre-filing through post-denial strategy. Panelists will cover identifying red flags and counseling clients on enforcement exposure. They also will address responding to RFEs, NOIDs, and denials, as well as pursuing motions, appeals, or strategic refiling. Finally, panelists will discuss current adjudication trends, heightened risks for U/T visa and VAWA petitioners, and how to plan when an affirmative case becomes a removal defense matter.

- Counseling clients on enforcement risks from affirmative filings, interviews, NTAs, detention, and ICE encounters
- Special risks for U/T visa and VAWA survivors, including ICE's 2025 detention/removal policy shift, BFD revocations, and limits under *ICWC v. Noem*
- Responding strategically to RFEs and NOIDs before denial
- Using the existing record to strengthen post-denial strategy

3:30 pm–4:00 pm Networking Break

4:00 pm–5:00 pm **Good Moral Character 2.0: Naturalization Under USCIS's New Holistic Review Standard**

Since USCIS issued its August 2025 memorandum restoring a "rigorous, holistic, and comprehensive" good moral character (GMC) review, adjudications have slowed and shifted from a primarily checklist-based analysis to a "totality of the circumstances" standard.

- How officers are weighing positive equities against negative factors
- Rise in discretionary denials and requests for evidence

- Challenging denials under INA §336(b), federal district court review
 - Due process and vagueness challenges to subjective GMC determinations
- Preparing clients with prior arrests, dismissed charges, or adverse immigration history
- Intersection of GMC findings with denaturalization exposure

5:15 pm Reception

Friday, November 6, 2026

Business Track

- 8:00 am–9:00 am **Hot Topics in International Student Immigration**
International students, institutions, and employers face a rapidly changing immigration landscape. Panelists will review recent developments, practitioner insights, and litigation trends to identify emerging risks and opportunities. They also will offer practical guidance for anticipating problems, responding to adverse actions, and advising clients through uncertainty.
- Recent agency guidance, policy changes, and litigation developments
 - Employment authorization issues, including OPT, STEM OPT, and CPT compliance concerns
 - Visa issuance, revocation, and travel challenges, including social media vetting and reentry considerations
 - SEVIS terminations, status violations, and reinstatement strategies
 - Advising universities, students, and employers on compliance, contingency planning, and long-term status options
- 9:00 am–9:30 am Networking Break
- 9:30 am–10:30 am **Navigating the Fog: Strategic Responses to USCIS Employment-Based RFEs and Denials**
Recent employment-based adjudication trends show more RFEs, NOIDs, and denials that appear to depart from governing statutes and regulations. Panelists on this intermediate-to-advanced session will examine these developments and their practical impact on employment-based practice using representative adjudications.

- All events, sessions, and conference materials are subject to change

- Anticipating atypical requests, drafting persuasive responses, and preserving the strongest possible record
- Evaluating post-denial options: refiling, motions to reopen or reconsider, AAO appeals, and federal court relief through mandamus or other litigation
 - Evidentiary, procedural, and venue considerations in post-denial advocacy
- Recent legal developments and ethical obligations

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

11:00 am–12:00 pm **PERM Drafting Success and DOL Trends: Strategies for Unique Cases, RFIs, and Denials**

As DOL scrutiny of PERM applications increases, practitioners must navigate evolving adjudication trends, heightened technical review, and a growing number of RFIs and denials. Panelists will explore practical strategies for successfully drafting and managing PERM cases, with a focus on unique positions, nontraditional requirements, and common compliance pitfalls. Through real-world examples and practical guidance, panelists will provide attendees with tools to strengthen PERM filings, mitigate risk, and navigate challenging cases with confidence.

- Drafting prevailing wage requests and ETA Form 9089 applications for unique or specialized roles
- Addressing educational evaluations, alternative requirements, and experience gained with the employer
- Telecommuting, travel requirements, and other worksite-related considerations
- Distinguishing similar or related positions within the same organization, including layoff-related issues
- Strategies for responding to RFIs and denials, and evaluating refiling, reconsideration, or appeal options

12:00 pm–1:00 pm **Lunch Break**

1:00 pm–2:00 pm **Mastering H-1B and L-1 Adjudications: 2026 Trends and Pitfalls**

Panelists will analyze the evolving landscapes for H-1B and L-1 petitions, focusing on new USCIS scrutiny, updated regulatory requirements, and increased evidentiary expectations. They also will share practical strategies for navigating complex filing scenarios, lottery updates, and specialized visa criteria to improve petition success.

- Critical H-1B updates
 - Weighted lottery system
 - Wage levels
 - New educational and experience questions on Form I-129
- Current L-1A/L-1B trends regarding qualifying corporate relationships, managerial/executive roles, and specialized knowledge eligibility
- Complex scenarios
 - \$100K fee
 - Maintenance of status
 - B-2 bridge filings
 - Ever-increasing evidentiary expectations

2:00 pm–2:30 pm Networking Break

2:30 pm–3:30 pm **Navigating Evolving Consular Processing Challenges for NIV and IV Cases**

Practitioners must navigate an increasingly complex consular landscape shaped by policy developments, shifting consular practices, and changing pathways to permanent residence. Panelists will share key considerations when pursuing consular processing versus adjustment of status, emerging NIV challenges at consulates worldwide, and the unique issues facing individuals in temporary humanitarian and other nontraditional immigration statuses.

- Evolving trends
- Decision-making considerations:
 - Consular processing vs. adjustment of status
 - Dual-intent and non-dual-intent visa considerations
 - Pathways to permanent residence for individuals in TPS, DACA, parole, and other temporary statuses
- Interview waivers, administrative processing, INA §221(g) refusals, security vetting, and post-specific adjudication practices
- E-1 and E-2 visa trends, evidentiary expectations, and practical strategies for navigating increasingly complex consular adjudications

3:30 pm–4:00 pm Networking Break

4:00 pm–5:00 pm **A Business Immigration Lawyer's Guide to Removal Defense**

- All events, sessions, and conference materials are subject to change

Business immigration practitioners can no longer assume their cases will remain exclusively before USCIS. Whether representing nonimmigrants seeking extensions or changes of status, employers responding to adverse agency action, or adjustment applicants whose cases take an unexpected turn, practitioners must understand how to navigate the intersection of USCIS and EOIR. Panelists will explore the procedural, strategic, and ethical considerations that arise when business immigration and removal defense converge, equipping attendees with practical tools to protect clients at every stage of the process.

- Recognizing NTA triggers and enforcement trends affecting employment-based cases
 - Counseling employers and foreign nationals on risk mitigation strategies before adverse agency action results in an NTA
- Distinguishing lawful status, authorized stay, and unlawful presence and their impact on removability and future immigration benefits
- Litigation strategies for when clients have pending petitions, extensions, changes of status, or adjustment applications before USCIS
- Evaluating jurisdiction and choosing the right path: termination, dismissal, administrative closure, or continued proceedings
- Coordinating business, family, and removal defense counsel while meeting ethical duties and protecting client interests

5:15 pm

Reception

Saturday, November 7, 2026

Litigation Track

8:30 am–9:30 am

Federal Habeas Landscape in California: Challenging Unlawful Detention and Implicit Bias (Implicit Bias)

As habeas litigation becomes an increasingly critical tool for challenging prolonged and unlawful detention, practitioners need a clear picture of how California's federal districts are deciding these cases and the role implicit bias. Panelists will compare receptivity, timelines, and remedies across the Southern, Eastern, Central, and Northern Districts. They will cover the strongest bases for relief, strategies for challenging systemic bias in bond hearings, and what to do when the government fails to comply with a favorable order.

- Current trends, outcomes, and how to identify systemic bias

- Common bases for habeas relief, including prolonged detention, bond hearing claims, and unlawful custody determinations
- Challenging systemic bias in bond hearings, including improper burden allocation and patterns of categorical denials
- Motions to enforce habeas orders when the government fails to comply with court-ordered relief
- Practical guidance on venue, filing strategy, building an effective record, and lessons from recent decisions

9:30 am–10:00 am Networking Break

10:00 am–11:00 am **Administrative Law as a Defense Tool: APA Challenges to Immigration Agency Action**

Panelists will discuss how to challenge affirmative agency actions — e.g., rules, terminations, and enforcement decisions — that fail to meet the Administrative Procedure Act’s (APA’s) procedural and substantive requirements. They will provide practical strategies for identifying vulnerable agency action and building a strong record for challenge.

- Identifying agency actions vulnerable to APA challenges, including enforcement actions, parole terminations, TPS rescissions, and informal guidance
- Notice-and-comment requirements and challenging rules issued without proper procedure
- Reliance interests and their role in “arbitrary and capricious” review
- Retroactivity challenges to new policies applied to pending cases
- Due process considerations that complement and strengthen APA claims

11:00 am–11:30 am Networking Break

11:30 am–12:30 pm **Federal Court Strategies for Tackling Unreasonable Delays**

When agency delay becomes the problem, how does one compel a decision through federal court? Panelists will cover practical strategies for identifying strong delay cases and litigating them from demand letter to resolution.

- Preparing for unreasonable delays under new agency policies and understanding when delay becomes actionable

- Identifying strong candidates for mandamus and APA unreasonable delay actions, including case types, timelines, and client risk factors
- The legal framework for compelling agency action, including TRAC factors and jurisdictional considerations
- Practical guidance on drafting, filing, and litigating mandamus actions, from demand letters through government responses and settlement
- Case studies and practical tips for integrating federal court litigation into your practice

12:30 pm Conference Concludes

Saturday, November 7, 2026

Specialty Topics Track

8:30 am–9:30 am Reclaiming the Narrative: Basic Media Training for Engaging Deliberately and Effectively with Journalists

Whether responding to breaking immigration developments, highlighting client stories, or serving as a trusted legal expert, attorneys play an important role in shaping public understanding of immigration law. Panelists will provide practical guidance on working effectively with journalists, developing a thoughtful media strategy, and communicating with clarity in high-pressure situations. They also will discuss how to navigate interviews, protect client confidentiality, and engage with the media in ways that advance accurate reporting and ethical advocacy.

- Understanding the media landscape and determining when to speak on the record, on background, or off the record
- Developing a proactive media strategy, including identifying key messages, building relationships with reporters, and responding to media inquiries
- Selecting the right communication platform — e.g., traditional print and television, podcasts, digital publications, and social media — to reach different audiences
- Timing media engagement around breaking news, litigation, policy announcements, and other news cycles to maximize impact
- Ethical and practical considerations, including protecting client confidentiality, obtaining informed consent, handling sensitive cases, and delivering clear, concise interviews under pressure

9:30 am–10:00 am Networking Break

10:00 am–11:00 am **Representing Clients in Crisis: Trauma-Informed Advocacy and Responsible Communication in a Rapidly Shifting Legal Landscape**
Clients often arrive in the United States with significant trauma, and today's enforcement climate can intensify that harm. Heightened fears of detention, family separation, and sudden case developments may deepen memory gaps, complicate testimony, and strain the attorney-client relationship, often when a strong, well-documented record matters most. Panelists will equip practitioners with trauma-informed techniques for interviewing, preparing, and communicating with clients in crisis, while avoiding retraumatization and building credible, well-documented records.

- Trauma-informed approaches to interviewing, including navigating memory gaps, inconsistent testimony, interpreter use, and credibility concerns
- Preparing clients and witnesses for court, interviews, declarations, and bond hearings while avoiding retraumatization and building stronger records
- Documenting trauma and hardship evidence to withstand scrutiny in adjudications, bond determinations, and appellate review
- Recognizing and responding to acute distress, including fear of detention or enforcement action, without compromising case strategy
- Delivering significant legal developments to traumatized clients: pacing, tone, and communication approaches that inform without retraumatizing

11:00 am–11:30 am Networking Break

11:30 am–12:30 pm **No Perfect Choice: Client Communication, Ethics, and Risk Management During Legal Uncertainty (Ethics)**
Immigration attorneys often must advise clients when the law is unsettled, policies are changing quickly, and no option is risk-free. Panelists will examine how to provide competent, ethical guidance amid uncertain adjudications, shifting agency guidance, travel concerns, enforcement exposure, delays, denials, litigation choices, and the risks of inaction. They also will discuss best practices for communicating legal developments, managing client expectations and risk tolerance, documenting advice, obtaining informed consent, and using engagement letters, client alerts, and technology to stay ahead of a fast-moving

- All events, sessions, and conference
materials are subject to change

landscape. [ABA Model Rules 1.1, Competence, 1.4 Communication and 2.1 Advisor]

- Ethical client communication under Rules 1.4 and 2.1 amid rapid legal change: accuracy, avoiding misinformation, managing expectations while meeting professional responsibility obligations.
- Assessing individual risk tolerance and obtaining informed consent
- Documenting advice and managing risk when the law shifts overnight
- Communication systems: engagement letters, mass client notifications, and technology solutions

12:30 pm

Conference Concludes

Conference Program Committee

Tami V. Castillo, Conference Committee Chair, Sacramento, CA

Diana Velloso Coker, San Diego, CA

Jioselin A. Juarez Contreras, Cerritos, CA

Arwa Z. Kakavand, San Diego, CA

Tiffany Martinez, San Francisco, CA

Edith Nazarian, Glendale, CA

Anne Rowley, San Diego, CA

Jennifer Rozdzielski, Torrance, CA

Smriti Sahni, Sunnyvale, CA

Abhinav Tripathi, San Jose, CA

Judy H. Wong, San Francisco, CA

Michael Orlando, AILA Associate Director of Professional Development, Washington, D.C.