



AMERICAN  
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## 2026 AILA Midwinter Conference and Webcast

Escape the cold at the 2026 AILA Midwinter Conference and Webcast in sunny Guanacaste, Costa Rica! Sharpen your skills while warming up on the beach or by the pool. This year's conference features an advanced-level Business Track and an advanced-level Removal Track. The expert panelists for these sessions will discuss the latest developments in the ever-changing world of immigration law and advise on best practices for dealing with them. Highlights of the Business Track include panels on NIVs and E visas, while the Removal Track features sessions on detention and humanitarian issues. As always, your registration includes recordings of both tracks. Come network and learn with your colleagues as we enjoy everything Costa Rica has to offer!

**January 23, 2026**  
**JW Marriott Guanacaste Resort and Spa**  
**Guanacaste, Costa Rica**

*Times listed on the program are Central Standard Time (GMT -6)*  
*Note: All sessions and events are subject to change without notice.*

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### FRIDAY, JANUARY 23, 2026

#### REMOVAL/FAMILY TRACK

7:30 am – 4:00 pm      **Registration and Exhibits**

8:25 am – 8:30 am      **Opening Remarks**  
*John Gihon, Conference Program Committee Co-Chair/AILA ICE Liaison Committee Chair,*  
*Altamonte Springs, FL*

8:30 am – 9:30 am      **Hot Topics in Removal Practice**  
This session features important updates and late-breaking news regarding the constant changes and developments in immigration court, federal litigation, and enforcement. Panelists will focus on the most recent and important topics affecting practitioners and clients in the ever-evolving landscape of removal defense.

- Federal litigation affecting detention and removal cases
- BIA and federal court decisions
- Detention trends and developments
- EOIR and ICE policies and new regulations

\* = invited, not confirmed

DL = Discussion Leader

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

*Faculty:*

*John Gihon (DL), Conference Program Committee Co-Chair/AILA ICE Liaison Committee Chair,  
Altamonte Springs, FL*

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

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

9:30 am – 10:00 am      **Networking Break**

10:00 am – 11:00 am      **Uncivil Detention: Combatting the New Normal**

The Trump administration has been using detention at an unprecedented rate to realize their mass deportation agenda, with the predictable results of violating the standards of civil detention. Panelists will discuss some of the key issues attorneys should address when working with detained migrants.

- Naming the problem: an overview of the current trends and learning what questions to ask
- Papering your case: how to document violations of civil and human rights in custody when you encounter them
- Pushing for change: advocating for course correction using all available tools including the media, the public, the legislature, and the courts
- “Yes, habeas corpus is still a thing you can do!”: timing, procedure, ancillary concerns, and success stories

*Faculty:*

*Susan Girardo Roy (DL), Princeton Junction, NJ*

*Sarah Weston Hayes Owings, Conference Planning Committee, Atlanta, GA*

*Kelly White, Washington, D.C.*

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

11:30 am – 12:30 pm      **Ethical Practice Before EOIR (Ethics)**

Panelists will advise on learning ways to develop the record regarding due process and protecting your practice. They also will dive into the ethical issues related to DHS’s push to dismiss “improvidently issued” NTAs and recalendar administratively closed cases to proceed to finality.

- Challenging DHS’s effort to recalendar and “resolve the respondent’s case on the merits”
  - Pushing back against proper service and noncompliance with practice manual issues
  - Contesting the authority of the NTA preparer
  - Relitigating prior pleadings in light of Pereira
  - Challenging the basis for recalendering and when to move to re-administratively close the case
- Fighting DHS’s effort to dismiss and clear dockets
  - Ethically advising clients about court appearances and detention
  - Limiting in absentia orders
  - Scope of services considerations

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- How to handle cases reassigned to remote judge: 30-day clearance
- Best practices for reconnecting with old clients and when/how to ethically withdraw based on workload or scope of services

*Faculty:*

*Matthew G. Holt (DL), Conference Program Committee, San Diego, CA*

*Michelle Saenz-Rodriguez, AILA Treasurer, Dallas, TX*

*Jesse A. Lloyd, Conference Program Committee, Oakland, CA*

12:30 pm – 1:30 pm **Lunch (Provided)**

1:30 pm – 2:30 pm **Agency Enforcement Beyond ICE**

The Trump administration has pushed USCIS, CBP, and DOS to double down on their role as enforcement agencies. Panelists will discuss the latest agency trends—increased fraud investigations, NTAs, and other enforcement actions—and best practices for how to deal with them.

- United States Citizenship and Immigration Services
- Customs and Border Protection
- Department of State
- Department of Labor

*Faculty:*

*Nicholas Jesus Mireles (DL), AILA Board of Governors, Los Angeles, CA*

*Jerome G. Grzeca, AILA Rule of Law Task Force Chair, Milwaukee, WI*

*Mahsa Khanbabai, AILA Board of Governors, Easton, MA*

2:30 pm – 3:00 pm **Networking Break**

3:00 pm – 4:00 pm **Humanitarian Hot Topics**

The Trump administration has imposed myriad changes upon the humanitarian immigration landscape. Panelists will provide an in-depth overview of the current state of play for major forms of humanitarian relief in light of these changes, and they will share best practices to providing zealous advocacy to vulnerable communities.

- Navigating expedited removal orders for humanitarian-based relief
- Asylum bans, injunctions, and filing fees
- Navigating changes to SIJS, U and T visas, and VAWA self-petitions
- Updates to TPS and alternative relief

*Faculty:*

*Sophia M. Genovese (DL), Conference Program Committee, Albuquerque, NM*

*Stephanie Morales, Minneapolis, MN*

*Dalia Castillo-Granados, Houston, TX*

4:00 pm **Conference Concludes**

5:30 pm – 7:00 pm **Happy Hour**

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DL = Discussion Leader

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## BUSINESS TRACK

7:30 am – 4:00 pm **Registration and Exhibits**

8:25 am – 8:30 am **Opening Remarks**

*Ramon E. Curiel, Conference Program Committee Co-Chair, San Antonio, TX*

8:30 am – 9:30 am **Hot Topics: Examining Year One of the Trump Administration**

One down, three to go! A look back at the first year of Trump 2.0. Panelists will discuss the most significant developments and trends in business immigration.

- USCIS adjudication
- PERM
  - RFI trends
  - Processing times
  - Denials (experience gained on the job)
- Latest worksite compliance trends (I-9s, LCAs, FDNS, etc.)
- The Latest in business-focused litigation
  - Creating the record
  - What happens after RFE and denial
  - Interplay between business and removal defense
- What lies ahead

*Faculty:*

*Ramon E. Curiel (DL), Conference Program Committee Co-Chair, San Antonio, TX*

*Jeff Joseph, AILA President, Denver, CO*

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

*Sharvari Dalal-Dheini, Senior Director, Government Relations, AILA, Washington, D.C.*

9:30 am – 10:00 am **Networking Break**

10:00 am – 11:00 am **Complex Consular Issues for NIV Applicants**

Although securing an appointment or preparing a client for an upcoming interview may have seemed straightforward in the past, nonimmigrant visa (NIV) processing has become increasingly more difficult, and clients risk being turned away by security for their appointment. Our experts will discuss tips and tricks on securing appointments, anticipating potential pitfalls, and troubleshooting case problems.

- Securing appointments: setting expectations, recommending locations, and submitting emergency requests
- Everchanging process requirements: passport changes, booking profiles, reciprocity changes, interview waiver and other documentation
- Demystifying the DS-160: understanding when to submit, when a new DS-160 is necessary, and what to do if the information changes
- Navigating complex scenarios: helping visa applicants from India, China, Russia, Iran, and other locations
- NIV applications: determining likelihood for approval

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*Faculty:*

*Lynn Marie Lee (DL), Conference Program Committee, Clifton, VA*  
*Claire S. Pratt, AILA DOS Liaison Committee Vice Chair, San Francisco, CA*  
*Matt Mauntel-Medici, Des Moines, IA*

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

11:30 am – 12:30 pm    **Advanced Topics: NIVs**

*What's hot in nonimmigrant visas? Panelists will share strategies on how to respond to the latest NIV challenges.*

- RFEs, including O-1s, H-1Bs, Ls, and criminal issues
- H-1B Issues: cap regulatory changes, SOC codes
- Student issues: status of SEVIS, OPT, and other issues
- Interplay with removal defense: NTAs issued with denials

*Faculty:*

*Robert Lee DeMoss II (DL), Conference Program Committee, Atlanta, GA*  
*Maka Hutson, AILA Student Visa Task Force Vice Chair, Dallas, TX*  
*Bushra A. Malik, Conference Program Committee, Troy, MI*

12:30 pm – 1:30 pm    **Lunch (Provided)**

1:30 pm – 2:30 pm    **E2 and EB-5 Investor Programs**

One would think that programs enabling foreign investors to enter the United States to create jobs would be straightforward and not face undue pushback. But the reality is different under the Trump administration. So, is it still good business to invest in the United States? Experts will discuss the latest challenges in the E-2 and EB-5 investor visa practices, with an additional focus on consular trends.

- The effects of DOS resource reductions on the timing and quality of visa processing and appointments
- How the sharing of information between the IRS, DOS, ICE, and USCIS can lead to surprise RFEs or worse
- The state of play with EB-5 grandfathering expiring in less than nine months
- Legislative, regulatory, and judicial updates: What exactly is the law right now?
- Is a gold card or something else on the horizon?

*Faculty:*

*Halston Chavez (DL), Tega Cay, SC*  
*Joey Barnett, AILA EB-5 Investor Committee Vice Chair, Los Angeles, CA*  
*Teri A. Simmons, Atlanta, GA*

2:30 pm – 3:00 pm    **Networking Break**

3:00 pm – 4:00 pm    **But, I Am in Status! The Brave New World of Maintaining Status**

Trump 2.0 is focusing on taking legal status away from those who have it. Throughout the past year, the administration has positioned itself to deny NIV petitions and adjustment of status

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applications based on a new interpretation and enforcement of the maintenance of status rules. Panelists will explore those changes and how they are affecting both NIV visa holders and adjustment of status applicants.

- Alien registration, change of address, remote work, amended NIV petitions
- Is a period of authorized stay or a grace period sufficient to maintain status?
- What is the effect of an employer notifying USCIS that an NIV holder is no longer employed? How is this impacting H-1B portability?
- Special considerations regarding maintenance of status for those in F-1 or J-1 status
- How are maintenance of status issues affecting AOS applicants?
- Duration of status, maintaining status, CPT

*Faculty:*

*Lisa Helen York (DL), Conference Program Committee, Aurora, CO*

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

*David W. Cook, Conference Program Committee, Columbus, OH*

4:00 pm

**Conference Concludes**

5:30 pm – 7:00 pm

**Happy Hour**

## **Conference Program Committee**

### **Advanced Removal/Family Track**

*John Gihon, Conference Program Committee Co-Chair/AILA ICE Liaison Committee Chair, Altamonte Springs, FL*

*Sophia M. Genovese, Albuquerque, NM*

*Matthew G. Holt, San Diego, CA*

*Leena Adamali Khandwala, Newark, NJ*

*Jesse A. Lloyd, Oakland, CA*

*Sarah Weston Hayes Owings, Atlanta, GA*

### **Advanced Business Track**

*Ramon E. Curiel, Conference Program Committee Co-Chair, San Antonio, TX*

*David W. Cook, Columbus, OH*

*Robert Lee DeMoss II, Atlanta, GA*

*Matthew T. Galati, Elkins Park, PA*

*Lynn Marie Lee, Clifton, VA*

*Bushra A. Malik, Troy, MI*

*Rita Sostrin, Woodland Hills, CA*

*Lisa Helen York, Aurora, CO*

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

*Sarah Kra, Education and CLE Programs Associate, Washington, D.C.*

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