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ASSOCIATION

2026 AILA Paralegals Virtual Conference “Expect the Unexpected” (Two Days, Dual Live Tracks with Recordings)

At the heart of successful immigration firms are highly effective and skilled paralegals and support staff. **In the current environment, with constantly changing policies and procedures, their success is even more critical than ever before.** This September, AILA is hosting a two-day, virtual conference that will provide paralegals and support staff with guidance on the complexities and practicalities of immigration law, preparing them to effectively assist their supervising attorneys and clients. Designed by AILA members (including former paralegals) with experience training support staff, the program will feature expert faculty covering all aspects of what an immigration paralegal encounters in day-to-day practice. Faculty will begin by providing a foundational overview of the paralegal’s role before expanding into subject-matter-specific information on a range of topics **both introductory and more advanced.** Sessions will delve into issues relevant to employment-based immigration, removal and humanitarian options, immigrant visa processing, family-based immigration, and much more. In addition, **there will be panels incorporating artificial intelligence (AI) and technology** into client and caseload management. Each session will culminate with a question-and-answer period, allowing attendees to interact directly with faculty and gain further insights. Don’t miss this exciting opportunity to hone your paralegal skills!

Viewing Options: All registrants will be given a link to the entire set of conference sessions and their recordings, so any sessions missed can be revisited later (particularly helpful for our West Coast participants given the time difference).

**September 9–10, 2026
Virtual Conference**

Times listed on the program are Eastern Time (ET)

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

(DL) = Discussion Leader

* = invited, not confirmed

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Wednesday, September 9

Time	Business	Removal/Humanitarian
9:45 am–10:00 am	Welcome Address	
10:00 am–11:30 am	How to Succeed as a Paralegal	
12:00 pm–1:00 pm	Business Immigration Hot Topics	Removal/Humanitarian Hot Topics
	Technology/Practice Management	Fundamentals
1:40 pm–2:40 pm	Advanced Case Intake and Client Communication: Artificial Intelligence Edition	Key Elements of Removal Cases
3:10 pm–4:10 pm	AI-Powered Drafting and Digital Filing	Key Elements of a Humanitarian-Based Case
4:40 pm–5:40 pm	Tech-Forward Case Management and Career Growth	Common Pitfalls in Immigration Cases: Issue Spotting

Thursday, September 10

Time	Business	Non-Business
10:00 am–11:00 am	Key Elements of Employment-Based Cases	Preparing Robust Humanitarian Petitions in an Era of Extreme Vetting
11:30 am–12:30 pm	Key Elements of a Family-Based Case	Advanced Family-Based Issues
1:30 pm–2:30 pm	Advanced H-1B Panel: The Weighted Cost of H-1Bs	Naturalization and Citizenship Cases: From Screening to Interview
3:00 pm–4:00 pm	PERM in Practice: Advanced Issue Spotting and Filing Strategies	Consular Processing and the NVC: “What’s Old Is New Again”
4:30 pm–5:30 pm	“It’s Extraordinary!” Applications Representing Investors and Immigrants of Extraordinary Ability	Habeas Corpus Petitions

Wednesday, September 9, 2026

9:45 am – 10:00 am **Welcome and Remarks**

10:00 am – 11:30 am **How to Succeed as a Paralegal**

Immigration paralegals are often the backbone of a successful practice; they do much more than prepare forms and gather documents. They guide clients through life-changing processes, keep cases moving forward, and serve as critical partners to attorneys. Panelists will explore the skills, mindset, and professional habits that lead to success in the role while providing practical guidance on building a rewarding long-term career.

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- Redefining the immigration paralegal role and how it contributes to firm success
- Becoming an indispensable partner to your attorney while juggling complex caseloads and competing priorities
- Communicating with empathy while maintaining boundaries with your attorney(s) and clients
- Knowing your ethical limitations and when to ask questions of the attorney
- Shaping your career development, leadership pathways, and professional growth

11:30 am – 12:00 pm **Break**

Track One

12:00 pm – 1:00 pm **Business Immigration Hot Topics**

The last two years have been filled with fast-moving changes in business immigration. Panelists will discuss the latest updates and developments that significantly impact employment-based cases.

- Latest agency guidance: H-1Bs, adjustment of status (AOS), audits, I-9 enforcement
- Regulation updates, including elimination of duration of status (D/S) for F-1s and J-1s, prevailing wage releveling, digital signatures, Form AR-11
- State of play: executive orders, delayed adjudications (even when filed by premium processing), current status of the H-1B proclamation on \$100,000 fee, and travel ban(s)

1:00 pm – 1:40 pm **Lunch Break**

1:40 pm – 2:40 pm **Advanced Case Intake and Client Communication: Artificial Intelligence Edition**
*Expert panelists will provide an upgraded version of the “nuts and bolts” of case intake and client communication using artificial intelligence (AI) and automation. Paralegals will learn how technology can be used to strategically gather and organize incoming client data, leverage AI to populate case management systems efficiently, and use intelligent tools to manage client communications, all while keeping attorneys in the loop and using appropriate tone, completeness, and cultural sensitivity. **Keep intake moving by:***

- Using secure AI platforms to systematically chase down missing documents, manage unresponsive clients, and build automated follow-up sequences
- Using AI to extract accurate data from client documents and auto-populate case management fields
- Leveraging AI to cross-reference client information against prior filings, travel history, and prior status to identify inconsistencies or risk factors before attorney review
- Exploring how AI can supercharge outgoing client communications

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- Best practices for integrating WhatsApp, Short Message Service (SMS), and secure client portals: maintaining confidentiality and avoiding the unauthorized practice of law (UPL)

2:40 pm – 3:10 pm

Break

3:10 pm – 4:10 pm

AI-Powered Drafting and Digital Filing

Our panelists will guide paralegals through the full lifecycle of a petition: from building templates and structuring arguments through final digital submission. They will discuss how AI is transforming the way paralegals research, write, bolster, and file immigration cases, and they will address how to maintain quality control and attorney oversight throughout every stage of the process.

- Using AI to build firm-specific templates that automatically reflect the supervising attorney's style, firm protocols, and client culture
- Leveraging secure AI systems to translate raw evidence into cohesive legal arguments for complex cases like EB-1As, National Interest Waivers (NIWs), and PERM petitions
- Using AI to decode dense Requests for Evidence (RFEs) for targeted rebuttals
- Implementing rigorous quality control
- The e-filing frontier: managing USCIS portal updates, digital upload limits, and determining when paper filing is the better option

4:10 pm – 4:40 pm

Break

4:40 pm – 5:40 pm

Tech-Forward Case Management and Career Growth

Panelists will discuss how paralegals at every experience level can utilize AI to enhance their case management skills and set them up for career growth. Specifically, they will discuss how mastering your firm's tech stack, managing case lifecycles with precision, and proactively surfacing capacity and delay issues positions paralegals as indispensable strategic assets to the supervising attorney.

- Building custom reports and dashboards to track productivity, identify team capacity, and catch issues before they escalate
- Using activity logs and reporting tools to spot stalled cases, missing updates, and patterns of delay before the attorney notices
- Leveraging AI to summarize call notes, flag incomplete records, and enforce consistent case notes across the team
- Systematically cross-checking forms, deadlines, and data entry across high-volume filing batches to catch mismatches early
- The tech-savvy paralegal: using your technology skills to test tools, streamline workflows, and support adoption to elevate your role

Track Two

12:00 pm – 1:00 pm

Removal and Humanitarian Hot Topics

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Removal defense and humanitarian relief practice are changing quickly, with new policies, litigation, agency guidance, and enforcement priorities affecting how cases are screened, prepared, and adjudicated. In addition to other topics, expert panelists will discuss the May 21, 2026, USCIS policy memorandum on adjustment of status (AOS), immigration court staffing, Board of Immigration Appeals rule changes, and protections for survivors.

- Recent changes affecting removal proceedings, including enforcement priorities, Notices to Appear, prosecutorial discretion, administrative closure, and termination or dismissal strategies
- Updates in asylum, withholding of removal, and Convention Against Torture cases, including fees, filing deadlines, work authorization, credibility, corroboration, and country conditions evidence
- Current developments in humanitarian-based relief, including the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), U visas, T visas, Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), parole, Temporary Protected Status (TPS), and deferred action
- Practical strategies for monitoring policy changes, litigation updates, deadlines, and agency guidance from USCIS, EOIR, DHS, and federal courts

1:00 pm – 1:40 pm

Lunch Break

1:40 pm – 2:40 pm

Key Elements of Removal Cases

Panelists will explore the essential elements of removal cases, including common forms of relief, how to meet the requirements, and the processes for filing in court. They will discuss recent trends for case timelines and additional steps necessary under the current administration. Finally, they will provide practical approaches for managing case flow, organizing evidence, and making sure that you can build the best case for your removal client.

- Understanding filing requirements under the Immigration Court Practice Manual (ICPM)
- Strategies for gathering evidence, including the use of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)
- Tracking and managing deadlines
- Building a strong record for the case, including documenting the firm's work
- Plot twist: Your client got detained. Now what?
 - How to communicate with clients in detention
 - Managing expectations
 - The complications of gathering evidence from detention

2:40 pm – 3:10 pm

Break

3:10 pm – 4:10 pm

Key Elements of a Humanitarian-Based Case

Humanitarian-based immigration relief covers a broad spectrum of vulnerable client populations including asylees/refugees, and survivors of trauma, crime and trafficking. The relief can range from temporary to longer-term immigration paths

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through special nonimmigrant visa categories and petitions with clear immigrant intent. Panelists will focus on the underpinnings of working with clients while preparing asylum applications, U and T visa petitions, as well as SIJS and VAWA self-petitions.

- Overview of Forms I-589, I-914, I-918, and I-360; filing locations and fees
- Organizing evidence to match the required elements of harm
 - I-589: fear of harm in home country
 - VAWA: extreme cruelty/battery
 - SIJS: state court predicate findings, abuse/neglect/abandonment of child and best interests standards
 - U: certification, substantial harm, discretion
 - T: survivor of trafficking, extreme hardship
- Developing the declaration: from fact-gathering to final drafting
- Evidence of admissibility and discretion: weighing negative and positive factors

4:10 pm – 4:40 pm

Break

4:40 pm – 5:40 pm

Common Pitfalls in Immigration Cases: Issue Spotting

After the initial intake, immigration paralegals are often the “first line of defense” when it comes to identifying potential case complications. Attendees will learn how to recognize inconsistencies, missing documentation, and risk factors that could lead to delays, RFEs, or denials. Panelists will use hypotheticals to illustrate strategies that help paralegals flag concerns early, communicate effectively with attorneys, and proactively gather evidence to strengthen cases.

- Consistency: addresses, marital status, job history, and prior filings
- Uncovering potential landmines: criminal history, prior immigration violations, etc.
- Evidence of entries (or lack thereof): I-94s, paroles, stamps, etc.
- Beefing up discretionary and good moral character evidence
- Uncovering the truth: key questions to ask clients

Thursday, September 10, 2026

Track One

10:00 am – 11:00 am

Key Elements of Employment-Based Cases

In employment-based immigration matters, the paralegal plays a critical role in organizing the case strategy, gathering and analyzing supporting documentation, and helping ensure that each filing is accurate, complete, and timely. A strong paralegal must understand the framework of both nonimmigrant and immigrant visa categories, the distinct functions of the government agencies involved, and the procedural requirements that apply at each stage of the case. Expert panelists will provide an overview of the foundational knowledge necessary for paralegals to support the attorney effectively, identify potential issues early, and help guide the case from intake through filing and final adjudication.

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- Understanding the dichotomy between nonimmigrant and immigrant visa categories
- Brief descriptions of business nonimmigrant visa (NIV) categories
- Brief descriptions of agencies involved: DOS, USCIS, DOL, and CBP
- Filing requirements and tips for each agency
- Brief description of immigrant visa (IV) categories
- Importance of maintaining nonimmigrant status
- Consular processing versus adjustment of status (AOS)

11:00 am – 11:30 am **Break**

11:30 am – 12:30 pm **Key Elements of a Family-Based Case**

Family-based immigration remains one of the most common areas of immigration practice, but successful case preparation requires careful attention to eligibility, documentation, and potential inadmissibility issues. Panelists will review the essential components of family-based cases, from initial screening through AOS or consular processing, while also highlighting common pitfalls and best practices.

- Determining eligibility: family-based categories, qualifying relationships, the Visa Bulletin, and concurrent filing
- Intake and screening: entry method, AOS vs. consular processing, immigration history, criminal issues, public charge concerns, inadmissibility, and waivers
- Collecting evidence: identity/civil documents, relationship proof, affidavits, lawful entry, and complex family issues
- Preparing filings: Forms I-130, I-485, DS-260, I-864; income rules, joint sponsors, tax documentation, and common sources for RFEs
- Case management: filing, interviews, RFEs/Notices of Intent to Deny (NOIDs), deadlines, delays, policy updates, and post-filing evidence (especially marriage-based)

12:30 pm – 1:30 pm **Lunch Break**

1:30 pm – 2:30 pm **Advanced H-1B Panel: The Weighted Cost of H-1Bs**

The H-1B is a well-known, highly regulated, ever-evolving visa in business immigration. And the changes keep on coming, including the rise and fall of the \$100,000 Fee, weighted wage selection, the end of automatic employment authorization document (EAD) extensions for family members, AOS versus consular processing, and the return of the dreaded “kitchen sink” RFE. Panelists will discuss best practices from registration to consular processing, the changes and pitfalls, and the key questions to ask employers, beneficiaries, and attorneys.

- Preparing for the new H-1B registration and weighted wages
- Labor condition applications and public access files: prevailing versus weighted wages
- Preparing and filing the petition: online versus paper

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- Post-filing and beyond: RFEs and NOIDs, family matters, consular processing, and preparing for permanent residence
- Current state of play for H-1B visas, including presidential orders, agency actions, policies, memoranda, and litigation

2:30 pm – 3:00 pm

Break

3:00 pm – 4:00 pm

PERM in Practice: Advanced Issue Spotting and Filing Strategies

In PERM practice, precision is everything, and paralegals are on the front lines of collecting data, coordinating recruitment, maintaining the audit file, and catching inconsistencies before filing. Small discrepancies between the prevailing wage request, recruitment steps, and Form ETA-9089 can lead to the case being derailed. In this advanced session, panelists will examine complex PERM issues that experienced paralegals are likely to encounter. They also will offer practical guidance on building audit files and supporting attorneys in preparing approvable cases.

- Advanced issue spotting on intake, including minimum requirements, specific vocational preparation (SVP), alternative requirements, foreign language requirements, and business necessity
- Ensuring consistency between the prevailing wage request, recruitment, and Form ETA-9089, factoring in remote or hybrid work, roving employee, and multiple worksite arrangements
- Managing complex recruitment issues, including resume review, lawful job-related rejections, and documentation
- Building and preserving a clean audit file and preparing for documentation necessary for the I-140, including experience and ability to pay documentation

4:00 pm – 4:30 pm

Break

4:30 pm – 5:30 pm

“It’s Extraordinary!” Applications Representing Investors and Immigrants of Extraordinary Ability

In extraordinary ability, national interest waiver (NIW), outstanding researcher, and investor cases, the paralegal plays a central role in organizing evidence, shaping the narrative, and helping the attorney present a compelling case. These matters require more than document collection—they demand careful analysis of how each piece of evidence supports the legal standard, as well as a clear understanding of the distinctions among the various case types. Our panel of experts will provide guidance on how paralegals can help build a persuasive filing that tells the client’s story effectively while avoiding common weaknesses and pitfalls.

- EB-1As: analyze the documents based on the case requirements of each element
- EB-1As, NIW, and outstanding researcher applications: understanding the key distinctions
- Win the final merits argument

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- Managing voluminous financial documents in the context of an EB-5 application
- Source of funds narratives: No two cases are alike
- Documenting the story and common pitfalls to avoid

5:30 pm

Conference Concludes

Track Two

10:00 am – 11:00 am

Preparing Robust Humanitarian Petitions in an Era of Extreme Vetting

Explore the elements of filing preparation through the lens of the changing requirements to master the process. Panelists will discuss common pitfalls that lead to administrative rejection and how to overcome them, as well as the importance of making sure that documentarily qualified cases will survive heightened scrutiny. Panelists will also review best practices for amendments.

- Confirming client information in a manner that will survive extreme vetting
- What constitutes proper I-589 completion to avoid pretermission?
 - *Matter of C–A–R–R–* and “incomplete” applications
 - *Matter of H–A–A–V–* and “failure to state a claim”
- Fee payment management under the “One Big Beautiful Bill”
- Guidelines for successful declaration drafting
- How to amend an application at every phase of adjudication: tips from the experts

11:00 am – 11:30 am

Break

11:30 am – 12:30 pm

Advanced Family-Based Issues

Family dynamics are ever-evolving and, as such, assisting clients with family-based immigration petitions can present unique hurdles, unanticipated next steps, and a sometimes substantial shifting of gears. While a petition is pending, ethical issues can surface during attorney representation that impact how a law office supports the parties affected when they have decided to separate. Petitioners may pass away during long-pending processes and clients may acquire new family members, but family unity remains a constant priority. Our panelists will discuss strategies to navigate these tricky scenarios.

- Separation/divorce: conflicts of interest, limitations on communication and continued assistance
- Death of a petitioner: INA §204(I) and humanitarian reinstatement options, plus evidence required
- Adding family members: additional immediate relatives vs. preference category following-to-join options
- Impact of the current administration’s enforcement policies on AOS: documenting extraordinary cases and discretion

12:30 pm – 1:30 pm

Lunch Break

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1:30 pm – 2:30 pm

Naturalization and Citizenship Cases: From Screening to Interview

Naturalization and citizenship require careful screening, close attention to eligibility, alignment with previous filings, and satisfying the new good moral character standard. Panelists will walk through the key building blocks of naturalization and related citizenship cases, with an emphasis on issue spotting and practical case preparation. They also will address when a matter may involve derivative or acquired citizenship and how paralegals can help attorneys build a complete and well-documented filing.

- Screening eligibility for naturalization, including continuous residence, physical presence, and lawful permanent resident status
- Spotting common red flags: criminal history, extended travel, taxes, child support, Selective Service, prior misrepresentations or inconsistencies, and false claims to U.S. citizenship
- Tips for preparing forms N-400 and N-600 (online versus paper filings), and supporting evidence; derivative or acquired citizenship issues
- Interview preparation, civics and English testing, exemptions, and the N-648 medical disability exception
- Enhanced good moral character requirements and neighborhood visits

2:30 pm – 3:00 pm

Break

3:00 pm – 4:00 pm

Consular Processing and the NVC: “What’s Old Is New Again”

Whether preparing your client for consular processing as a nonimmigrant or immigrant visa application, the devil is in the details. Even in the best of times, attorneys and paralegals should not assume “business as usual” when it comes to processing at the National Visa Center (NVC) or the U.S. consulates. As a result, planning and preparation are crucial to success. Panelists will discuss key elements of consular processing for nonimmigrant and immigrant visas, best practices in preparation and execution including use of technology for more efficiency, and tips and tricks for navigating the old and new frontier while maintaining client expectations.

- Key resources to success: agency and consulate websites, immigrant visa process, reciprocity tables, and consulate-specific instructions
- Nonimmigrant visa applications: tips for filing the DS-160 and scheduling interviews in country of residence, including availability of interviews and emergency appointments
- NVC and immigrant visa (IV) applications: the Consular Electronic Application Center (CEAC) and preparing civil and financial documents
- Consulates and IV applications: preparing for the interview and extreme vetting, country bans, and cross-country strategies

4:00 pm – 4:30 pm

Break

4:30 pm – 5:30 pm

Habeas Corpus Petitions

With the significant uptick of individuals being detained by DHS, along with policy changes making it more difficult to get released and/or the looming potential of

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deportation to third countries, habeas corpus petitions and temporary restraining orders (TROs) are becoming a necessity in most detained cases. Panelists will focus on the different types of matters that require a habeas petition. They also will address what kind of support a paralegal can provide in these complex and time-sensitive matters.

- What situations would warrant a habeas petition in the immigration law context?
- What is required in a habeas petition? When is a TRO necessary?
- Preparing the summons, table of authorities for briefs, civil cover sheet and exhibits. Which parties are the defendants?
- Getting acquainted with the Public Access to Court Electronic Records (PACER) system, and filing the petition
- Timeline after filing the petition, including serving the summons and complaint, filing responses to replies from the U.S. attorney

5:30 pm

Conference Concludes

Conference Program Committee

Maurice “Mo” H. Goldman, Conference Program Committee Chair, Tucson, AZ

Tracie L. Morgan, Conference Program Committee Vice Chair, Atlanta, GA

Miki K. Matrician, AILA Board of Directors, Boston, MA

Robert W. Armstrong, Dallas, TX

Bridgette M. Bennett, Groveland, FL

Amber L. Blasingame, Colorado Springs, CO

Ramon E. Curiel, San Antonio, TX

Larry L. Drumm, Piedmont, CA

Cynthia Lucas, Pasadena, CA

Sarah W.H. Owings, Atlanta, GA

Lieselot Whitbeck, Stuart, FL

Ana Raquel Jiménez, AILA Affiliated Paralegal, Advisor, Chicago, IL

Cyndy G. Ramirez Clark, AILA Affiliated Paralegal, Advisor, Miami, FL

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

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

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