



AMERICAN
IMMIGRATION
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ASSOCIATION

August 16, 2021

Associate Director Jennifer B. Higgins
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services
Refugee, Asylum and International Operations Directorate
Washington, DC 20529

Via Email: Jennifer.B.Higgins@uscis.dhs.gov

Re: AILA Asylum & Refugee National Committee Meeting Request

Dear Associate Director Higgins,

On behalf of the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) and the Asylum & Refugee National Committee, we would like to request a meeting between the committee and the Refugee, Asylum and International Operations (RAIO) division to discuss pressing issues related to the asylum seekers and refugees we represent.

By way of background, AILA is a bar association of nearly 16,000 attorneys and law professors practicing and teaching in the field of immigration and nationality law. Experts in their field, AILA members regularly advise and represent asylum seekers, refugees and asylees as they navigate complicated immigration processes in the United States and abroad. Encouraged by U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services' (USCIS) recent invitation to provide input on reducing barriers across its services, we would like to have an open discussion with your office on recent policy updates, goals, trends, and problematic issues we see in the field.

Our volunteer committee members work in a range of practice settings across the country, including non-profits, law school clinics, and private practice. Committee members also represent detained non-citizens whose needs are particularly acute when seeking protection while confined. Many also engage in community-education initiatives for unrepresented individuals. Our committee members are eager to have a productive and solutions-oriented dialogue on issues of mutual concern regarding key refugee and asylum-related programs and applications. These include issues relating to affirmative interview procedures and policies, Form I-730 refugee/asylee petitions, employment authorization, and tracking the numerous asylum regulatory changes of recent years. We would also like to provide input on the Administration's reported plans to significantly change asylum-related procedures at the southern border.

For many years, AILA and other stakeholders have enjoyed a robust and mutually beneficial relationship with the RAIO division. We are eager to continue in that tradition. In addition, this meeting could help the RAIO division identify and implement essential enhancements that could more quickly lead to program improvements and administrative efficiencies. At minimum, our ability to reach and inform 16,000 members, and the individuals they represent, could reduce the risk of inadequate filings, the need for Requests for Evidence, and unnecessary anxieties among this vulnerable population.

Thank you for your consideration. Should you have any questions or require more information, please do not hesitate to contact Director of Government Relations Sharvari Dalal-Dheini (SDalal-Dheini@aila.org) or Policy Counsel Jennifer Ibañez Whitlock (jwhitlock@aila.com). We look forward to working with you and to continuing our collaboration in advancing your office's long-standing humanitarian mission.

Sincerely,

Victoria Neilson & Kathryn Weber
AILA Asylum & Refugee Committee Co-Chairs

cc: Ms. Carrie Selby, Acting Associate Director, External Affairs Directorate
Mr. Carlos Munoz-Acevedo, Chief Public Engagement Division
Ms. Amanda Baran, Chief, Office of Policy and Strategy