



AMERICAN
IMMIGRATION
LAWYERS
ASSOCIATION

2025 AILA Paralegals Conference and Webcast

At the heart of a successful immigration firm are highly effective and skilled paralegals and support staff. This July, AILA is hosting a two-day, in-person conference and simultaneous webcast that will provide paralegals and support staff with insights into the complexities and practicalities of immigration law, preparing them to effectively assist their supervising attorneys and clients. Designed by AILA members 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. Sessions will delve into issues relevant to employment-based immigration, removal and humanitarian options, immigrant visa processing, family-based immigration, and much more. 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 and network with your colleagues from across the country!

July 22-23, 2025
The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas
Las Vegas, NV

Times listed on the program are Pacific Time (PT)
Note: All sessions and events are subject to change without notice.

Tuesday, July 22, 2025

7:30 am – 5:30 pm Registration and Exhibits

8:00 am – 8:05 am Welcome and Remarks
Sandra Bruno, Conference Program Committee Chair, Towson, MD

8:05 am – 9:35 am The Many Hats of a Paralegal
The immigration paralegal supports lawyers by preparing petitions, gathering evidence, and assisting the attorney. In many ways, the paralegal is crucial to establishing the foundation of a successful case. Our panel of experts will explore the “many hats” a paralegal could potentially wear while providing this support, including case

(DL) = Discussion Leader

* = invited, not confirmed

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manager, interviewer, technical support, and translator. In addition, they will discuss important ethical issues unique to paralegals as well as how to incorporate wellness practices into their work.

- Communication with clients and the attorney
- Intake and interviews
- Case management and calendaring
- Managing access to attorney portals: Case Management/Electronic Case Files (CM/ECF), E-Filing, EOIR Courts & Appeals System (ECAS), USCIS, ERO eFile, and the Foreign Labor Application Gateway (FLAG)
- Paralegal vs. translator
- Ethics: unauthorized practice of law; conflicts of interest; confidentiality; training; fees and Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTAs); working remotely
- Wellness: healthy boundaries; managing vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue; avoiding burnout

Faculty:

Sandra Bruno (DL), Conference Program Committee Chair, Towson, MD

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

Angela N. Betzold, Paralegal, Executive and Co-Founder, Virtual Legal Assistant Services Company, Holland, MI

9:35 am – 10:05 am Networking Break

10:05 am – 11:05 am Forms, Files, and Futures: Artificial Intelligence (AI) as Your Immigration Paralegal Sidekick

Panelists will help you discover how artificial intelligence (AI) can be your ultimate sidekick in immigration paralegal work – speeding up forms, streamlining case preparation, managing evidence, and reducing errors. Learn to harness cutting-edge tools to automate workflows and elevate both efficiency and outcomes, all while staying grounded in ethical practices.

- Redefining diligence: ethical AI use in immigration paralegal practices
- Boosting efficiency: how AI streamlines immigration forms and case preparation
- AI tools for everyday immigration tasks: from Form I-589 to Form I-485
- Minimizing errors, maximizing outcomes: AI-powered quality control in immigration work
- From intake to filing: automating the immigration case lifecycle with AI
- Taming the paper trail: using AI to manage immigration evidence and deadlines

Faculty:

James L. Betzold (DL), Conference Program Committee, Holland, MI

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Brian Ramsey, Conference Program Committee, Las Vegas, NV
Larry L. Drumm, Piedmont, CA

11:05 am – 11:35 am Networking Break

11:35 am – 12:35 pm Efficiency and Cybersecurity in the Digital-ish Immigration Era
Get ready to level up your immigration law tech game! Expert panelists will cover when to e-file versus paper filing, how to survive U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) portals, ECAS drama, and NVC limbo without losing your mind. Plus, they will show you how to use AI, client portals, and secure messaging like a tech whiz, all the while keeping the hackers out and the deadlines in check.

- E-filing vs. paper filing: recommendations for specific forms, pitfalls to avoid, and how to navigate the USCIS online account
 - Introduction to ECAS
 - Consular Electronic Application Center (CEAC)/National Visa Center (NVC) basics
- Practice management systems
 - Email and text communication tools, including Rich Communication Services (RCS) and WhatsApp
- Cybersecurity for immigration law: secure file sharing and cloud storage, phishing awareness, and how to protect against spoofing

Faculty:

Reid Trautz (DL), AILA Senior Director, Practice & Professionalism Center and Innovation, Washington, DC

Margaret D. Stock, AILA Author, Immigration Law & the Military, 3rd ed., Anchorage, AK

Alma Martinez Ramirez, Paralegal, Cambridge, MA

12:35 pm – 1:35 pm Lunch Break (*provided by AILA for in-person attendees*)

1:35 pm – 2:35 pm Common Red Flags 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, Requests for Evidence (RFEs), or denials. Panelists will explore strategies to 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: travel, criminal background, registration, etc.
- Evidence of entries: I-94s, paroles, stamps, etc.
- Tax returns 101

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- Key questions to help uncover the truth

Faculty:

Y. "Jessica" Choi Kang (DL), Philadelphia, PA

Damian C. Caravez, Oakland, CA

Cheyenne R. Lash, Law Clerk, Philadelphia, PA

2:35 pm – 3:00 pm Networking Break

3:00 pm – 4:00 pm Navigating the World of Consular Processing
Panelists will focus on the "ins and outs" of consular processing for immigrant and nonimmigrant visas. They will explore the different electronic systems more in-depth, including how and where to file required documents. Finally, panelists will share common pitfalls and tricky questions.

- National Visa Center vs. a U.S. Embassy/Consulate
- Immigrant visa processing: step-by-step
- Nonimmigrant visa processing: step-by-step
- Dealing with visa refusals and denials

Faculty:

Margo Chernysheva (DL), Las Vegas, NV

Shaina Plaksin, Las Vegas, NV

Richard Yemm, Santa Monica, CA

4:00 pm – 4:10 pm Wellness Break

4:10 pm – 5:10 pm Networking Session (*separate in-person and virtual options*)
Meet paralegals from around the country during this dedicated networking event. We invite you to engage in meaningful conversations and build lasting relationships by sharing best practices and trends in a relaxed, yet professional environment.

5:10 pm – 6:00 pm Happy Hour
All conference participants are invited to attend a happy hour for networking and drinks following the first day of the conference.

Wednesday, July 23, 2025

Family/Removal Track

7:30 am – 5:00 pm Registration and Exhibits

8:00 am – 9:00 am Introduction to Family Categories, Removal Relief, and the Most Common Humanitarian Options
As life circumstances evolve, so do clients' needs and eligibility for relief. Whether it's marriage that leads to a new family-based path for a spouse and stepchildren or a past family-based petition with a current priority date, the panelists will provide a summary of the

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family-based process. They also will provide an introductory overview of relief available to clients in daunting situations such as victimization to violence and crime as well as individuals who find themselves in the throes of enforcement action and removal proceedings.

- Family-based petition basics from immediate relatives to preference-based categories
- Humanitarian-based options: Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), U visas, and T visas
- Removal defense relief: cancellation of removal (COR), asylum, withholding of removal (WOR), and the U.N. Convention Against Torture (CAT)

Faculty:

Cynthia Lucas (DL), Conference Program Committee, Pasadena, CA

Carolina Rondon, Las Vegas, NV

Christina L. Tong, San Diego, CA

9:00 am – 9:30 am Networking Break

9:30 am – 10:30 am Hot Topics in Family, Removal, and Humanitarian Cases
These cases are hotter than ever due to increased enforcement and longer processing times. From U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) check-ins and USCIS interviews to the mystery of whether Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and the many types of parole are ending (again), our panel of experts will cover what has been verified, what has been rumored, and how to keep clients prepared and panic-free.

- Changes in policy and practice
- Changes in statute
- Latest court decisions
- Enforcement: trends and latest developments

Faculty:

Annaluisa Padilla (DL), AILA Past President, West Covina, CA

Angela M. Graf, AILA Board of Governors, Las Vegas, NV

Kathia I. Quiros, Las Vegas, NV

10:30 am – 11:00 am Networking Break

11:00 am – 12:00 pm Proving Levels of Hardship and Showing Discretion
Almost all forms of relief from removal require (at minimum) a discretionary determination, with some requiring a showing of extreme hardship or higher. Panelists will describe each level of discretionary balancing determinations, including the legal standards and best evidence practices.

- Level 1: discretionary determinations and the balancing test (showing the positive and the negative)

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- Level 2: extreme hardship (beyond “common consequences”)
- Level 3: exceptional and extremely unusual hardship (more than extreme, less than unconscionable)
- Special rule (VAWA) standards
- Thorough documentation: child support, taxes, medical, criminal, and psychological
- Utilizing experts

Faculty:

Michelle L. Edstrom (DL), AILA ICE Liaison Committee Vice Chair, Oklahoma City, OK

Peter L. Ashman, Las Vegas, NV

Andrea L. Ashman, Paralegal, Las Vegas, NV

12:00 pm – 2:00 pm Lunch Break (Lunch will not be provided, explore the Las Vegas strip or see the AILA food guide for options nearby)

2:00 pm – 3:30 pm Preparing a Prima Facie Cancellation of Removal and Other Common Types of Relief Applications in Immigration Court
Panelists will focus on preparing and filing the most common types of relief applications before the immigration court, including asylum, cancellation of removal, and waivers. They will cover the essential elements of each form of relief, which forms to file and where, and the type of evidence that should be submitted to the court in support of each application.

- Statutory elements
- Forms: USCIS and EOIR
- Initial evidence
- Filing the application

Faculty:

Nallely Abad (DL), Minden, NV

Melissa Lujan, Oklahoma City, OK

Raissa Rivas, Las Vegas, NV

3:30 pm – 4:00 pm Networking Break

4:00 pm – 5:00 pm Preparing Successful Humanitarian Applications
Panelists will focus on the critical role of document gathering and affidavit preparation in humanitarian cases. They will cover how to identify and collect key evidence, work effectively and compassionately with clients to develop detailed and credible declarations, and support trauma-informed practices throughout the process.

- Trauma-informed techniques for working with clients to develop detailed, consistent affidavits: asylum, U visas, T visas, SIJS, and VAWA cases
- Strategies for identifying and collecting corroborating evidence in support of humanitarian relief applications

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- Addressing inconsistencies and gaps in documentation or client narratives with sensitivity and clarity
- Organizing a strong supporting document packet for submission: practical tips and best practices
- Managing secondary trauma

Faculty:

Tracie L. Morgan (DL), Conference Program Committee, Atlanta, GA

Sarah I. Perez, Las Vegas, NV

Alina Luna, Paralegal, Atlanta, GA

Business Track

7:30 am – 5:00 pm Registration and Exhibits

8:00 am – 9:00 am Introduction to Nonimmigrant and Immigrant Visa Categories
Understanding the distinctions between these employment-based visa types, their eligibility requirements, and application processes is crucial for prospective visitors and immigrants. Panelists will provide an overview of nonimmigrant visas (NIVs) for temporary stays in the United States, and immigrant visas (IVs) for those who wish to reside permanently in the country.

- Immigration lifecycle: from nonimmigrant to immigrant to citizen
- Visas vs. status
- Purpose and duration: NIV is temporary and IV is permanent
- Common types of NIVs: visitor, student, and work
- Common types of IVs: PERM-based, National Interest Waiver (NIW), multinational manager, investor, and diversity
- Challenges and considerations: maintenance of status, extension of status, change of status

Faculty:

Brenda Oliver (DL), AILA Business Section Steering Committee, Conference Program Committee, Reston, VA

Anne Rowley, San Diego, CA

Cyndy G. Ramirez Clark, Paralegal, Miami, FL

9:00 am – 9:30 am Networking Break

9:30 am – 10:30 am Hot Topics in Business Immigration
Shifting political climates, economic demands, and global talent trends have led to constant changes in business immigration. Expert panelists will discuss the latest immigration updates and developments for business immigration.

- Executive Orders
- Increased scrutiny and enforcement actions: site visits, I-9 audits, and judicial warrant actions
- The Alien Registration Requirement

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- F-1 student visa terminations
- Extreme vetting and travel

Faculty:

Margo Chernysheva (DL), Las Vegas, NV

Jeff Joseph, AILA President, Denver, CO

Neena Dutta, Conference Program Committee, New York, NY

10:30 am – 11:00 am Networking Break

11:00 am – 12:00 pm Detailed View of the Most Common NIV Categories: H-1Bs, Os, TNs, Es, and Ls

Although there are numerous nonimmigrant visa options available, foreign nationals seeking temporary work authorization in the United States often rely on one of five primary categories: H-1B, O, TN, E, or L. A strong understanding of these visa classifications is crucial for success at employment-based immigration firms. Panelists will provide an in-depth exploration of these five visa categories, equipping attendees with the essential knowledge and practical skills to assess cases effectively and draft compelling petitions.

- Eligibility requirements for each category and examples of common positions
- Identifying the best visa category when multiple options are viable
- H-1B problem areas and recent trends
- L-1 RFE trends and how to tackle the issue
- E visas: setting up the case and using consular websites for guidance
- O visas: organizing the evidence and structuring the case according to the attorney's strategy
- North or South TNs: preparing cases and identifying locations (i.e., Port of Entry vs. consulate)

Faculty:

Miki K. Matrician (DL), AILA Board of Governors, Boston MA

Hardeep "Dee" Sull, AILA Board of Governors, Las Vegas, NV

William Crotty, Charlotte, NC

12:00 pm – 2:00 pm Lunch Break (Lunch will not be provided, explore the Las Vegas strip or see the AILA food guide for options nearby)

2:00 pm – 3:30 pm Detailed View of the Most Common Employer-Sponsored Immigrant Visa Categories: PERMs, EB-1C, EB-2 vs. EB-3, and EB-5

Our panel of experts will provide paralegals with a detailed view of the PERM program: the importance of deadlines, and the paralegal's role in the process. They also will cover the multinational managers and executives category. Finally, they will discuss the key components involved when working on EB-5 cases.

- Detailed view of PERM

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- Red flags and common pitfalls
- In-depth look at EB-1Cs
- EB-2 vs. EB-3
- EB-5 Immigrant Investor Program

Faculty:

*Danielle M. Rizzo (DL), Buffalo, NY
Atessa Chehrazi, San Francisco, CA
Dillon R. Colucci, Los Angeles, CA*

3:30 pm – 4:00 pm Networking Break

4:00 pm – 5:00 pm Detailed View of EB-1A and National Interest Waiver Cases
Self-sponsored employment-based options have increased in popularity over the past several years, with USCIS and attorneys expanding the types of cases that may fit into the extraordinary ability (EB-1A) or National Interest Waiver (NIW) categories. Expert panelists will explain common (and novel) types of cases paralegals may come across in their work, help familiarize them with the types of evidence they may receive from clients, and guide them in compiling the final package to help attorneys tell a successful story.

- EB-1A extraordinary ability: defining the field, clarifying and quantifying the three and 10 criteria
 - Preparing for a successful final determination argument
- EB-2 NIW
 - Documenting the advanced degree professional or exceptional ability
 - Defining the endeavor
 - Navigating the case through three evidentiary prongs and identifying the proper evidence

Faculty:

*Ramon E. Curiel (DL), Conference Program Committee, San Antonio, TX
Flavia S. Lloyd, AILA Board of Governors, Newport Beach, CA
D. Simone Williams, Washington, D.C.*

5:00 pm Conference Concludes

Program Committee

*Sandra Bruno, Conference Program Committee Chair, Towson, MD
Brenda Oliver, AILA Business Section Steering Committee, Reston, VA
James L. Betzold, Holland, MI
Ofelia L. Calderon, Fairfax, VA
Breanna Cary, Edmond, OK
Ramon E. Curiel, San Antonio, TX
Neena Dutta, New York, NY*

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

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

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