

USCIS & AFGHAN EVACUEES

Volunteer Attorney Practice Update

May 2026

Contents of Practice Update:

1. Recent USCIS Policy Updates
2. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)
3. Tips on How to Best Support Clients During Periods of Increased Immigration Enforcement
4. Asylum Interview General Information
5. Chicago Asylum Office General Information

RECENT USCIS POLICY UPDATES

- **Adjustment of Status (“AOS” or “green card”) Applicants**
- **On April 29, 2026, DHS published an Interim Final Rule regarding certain fees that went into effect on May 29, 2026.**
 - The Rule confirms that the annual asylum fee (AAF) is required to be paid by every applicant for each calendar year their asylum application remains pending. The rule further states that the continued processing of a pending asylum case is conditioned on ongoing compliance with this annual payment.
 - **Consequences of failing to pay the AAF within 30 days of notice** (effective after May 29, 2026):
 - Rejection of the pending I-589 (this is not a final adjudication on the merits; a new I-589 and new filing fee are required to reapply)
 - Cancellation of any existing asylum-based EAD
 - Rejection or denial of any pending EAD application
 - Stoppage of the asylum clock
 - If the applicant lacks lawful status: issuance of a Notice to Appear (NTA) or initiation of expedited removal
 - If the applicant maintains lawful status: an NTA will be issued only if the facts support a charge of removability
 - Note: once an NTA is issued after rejection, any subsequent I-589 must be filed defensively with EOIR

- USCIS may reject any I-589 without the proper filing fee if it is postmarked on or after May 29, 2026.
- The rule also allows for USCIS to keep the fee for an I-589 if they reject the application.

- **Quick Refresher of AAF key details for affirmative asylum applications:**

How do I know if the AAF is due in my client's case?

- USCIS is supposed to issue Form I-797C, Annual Asylum Fee Notice, to applicant and courtesy copy to attorney when the AAF is due (*if you have concerns about receiving notices or if addresses have changed since filing, see alternative methods to verify if AAF is due below*);
- You can check [USCIS's "Check Case Status" page](#). Which should mention AAF payment requirement (if any is required at that time);
- Putting your client's information into the [Payment portal](#). The portal will only allow payment once the AAF is due.

How do I pay?

- Payments can only be made online at:
<https://my.uscis.gov/accounts/annual-asylum-fee/start/overview>
(same website as linked in "Payment portal" above);
 - Accepted methods include credit/debit card (including Visa gift card) or bank account;
 - Record the Agency Tracking ID provided to you;
 - After payment is accepted, save the confirmation page as a PDF and add client's A# and date onto PDF for your records;
- **Congress has passed a funding bill for DHS, which includes \$122.9 million for USCIS.** Of that amount, \$112 million supports the E-Verify program and \$10 million supports reducing the backlog of applications. This should include the travel costs for Chicago Asylum Officers conducting circuit-ride interviews in Minneapolis.
 - **USCIS To Lift Adjudicative Hold For "Thoroughly Screened" Asylum Seekers from Non "High-Risk" Countries (see list of affected countries/territories in FAQ section).** [NPR reports](#) USCIS will soon lift the [12/02/2025 adjudicative hold](#) previously placed on *all* affirmative asylum applications and will begin issuing decisions again on applications filed by some applicants. The agency *will maintain* the adjudicative hold for applications filed applicants from the 39 countries (and Palestinian Authority) designated as "high-risk" (see below). For applicants from a

designated “high-risk” country, please note this is a pause on adjudications only, meaning applicants may still file new applications and interviews are still being scheduled. On March 5, 2026, several immigrant service organizations filed suit against the administration's implementation of this hold. You can read more about this case [here](#).

ANSWERS TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q1. Is it safe for my client to attend biometrics appointments?

Biometrics appointments historically carry very little risk, and clients in Minnesota have not been experiencing arrests at these appointments. While there is always some risk under current enforcement policies, biometrics sites do not appear to be targeted by federal enforcement.

Volunteer attorneys do not need to accompany their clients to biometrics appointments. Clients may consider bringing a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident (LPR) friend/family member for peace of mind.

Q2. Is it safe for my client to attend asylum or other USCIS interviews?

Affirmative Asylum Interviews: We have no reports of ICE presence or arrests at the St. Paul asylum interview office. Interviews have been proceeding normally, and the environment appears safe, though risk is never zero.

Operation PARRIS Refugee Interviews: As a reminder, almost none of AHR-placed cases are for refugees, meaning neither this operation nor any subsequent litigation on the operation are likely to directly impact AHR cases. These refugee interviews occur at USCIS's Minneapolis Field Office. A preliminary injunction is currently in place that prohibits the detention or apprehension of refugees as part of Operation PARRIS.

Other USCIS Interviews: Detentions at USCIS interviews are rare and typically only occur in cases with significant extenuating circumstances. The isolated incidents of such apprehensions are not new, and most clients will not be at risk. If you are concerned about your client's specific facts or circumstances, please contact your AHR contact person to discuss.

Q3. Are asylum cases being scheduled for interview? How is USCIS deciding which cases to schedule?

Yes. Affirmative asylum interviews continue to be scheduled. Earlier this year, many Minnesota circuit-ride interviews were cancelled due to funding constraints and limits on officer travel. However, with the funding bill passed by Congress on April 30, 2026, these constraints to officer travel should no longer impact interviews.

The Asylum Office has confirmed it is back to its “regular” circuit-ride schedule moving forward. If an interview is scheduled, it is now more likely to proceed as planned. Additionally, there have been reports of the Asylum Office reaching out to attorneys to fill any empty interview slots. These have generally been for interview dates within a week or two of the call and accepting is optional.

According to USCIS reports, the sub-agency is scheduling cases for interview based on the following priorities, listed in order: (1) Rescheduled interviews, (2) Applications filed within the last 21 days, and (3) All other cases.

In practice, there’s a strong possibility that recently filed asylum applications may be scheduled for interview shortly after submission, though this is not guaranteed. In fact, we continue to see interviews scheduled across a wide range of filing dates, and not all previously cancelled interviews are rescheduled quickly.

Pro bono attorneys are encouraged to reach out to Staff Attorney and Affirmative Asylum Contact, Jillian Brown (jbrown@advrights.org), when they receive notice of a scheduled interview.

Q4. Is USCIS currently issuing asylum decisions?

No, as of March 29, 2026, affirmative asylum decisions have not been issued since the adjudicative hold was effectuated in December 2025. However, on March 30, 2026, USCIS stated they will soon begin issuing decisions on some affirmative asylum applications. See more in our Recent USCIS Policy Updates beginning with “USCIS To Lift Adjudicative Hold For ‘Thoroughly Screened’ Asylum Seekers from Non ‘High-Risk’ Countries.”

Q5. How does being from a “high-risk” country impact my client?

Applicants who are nationals of, or were born in, countries designated by USCIS as “high-risk” are affected by several USCIS policy changes.

As of January 1, 2026, USCIS has designated 39 countries, plus the Palestinian Authority, as “high-risk.” This list currently includes: Afghanistan, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burma (Myanmar), Burundi, Chad, Republic of the Congo, Côte d’Ivoire, Cuba, Dominica, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Gabon, The Gambia, Haiti, Iran, Laos, Libya, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania,

Niger, Nigeria, Palestinian Authority, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Tanzania, Togo, Tonga, Turkmenistan, Venezuela, Yemen, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Impact on Affirmative Asylum Applications: USCIS is maintaining an adjudicative hold on affirmative asylum decisions for applicants from these countries. This means cases may remain pending after interview with no decision issued until further guidance from USCIS. However, USCIS will continue to accept new asylum filings from applicants from high-risk countries, and asylum interviews are still being scheduled.

(c)(8) Work Authorization: Initial (c)(8) employment authorization applications based on a pending asylum case are excluded from this hold. If not adjudicated within 30 days, attorneys should follow the Rosario class-action procedures.

Impact on Other Immigration Benefits: USCIS has placed an indefinite hold on adjudication of most other immigration benefits, such as adjustment of status, travel documents, naturalization, and certain employment authorization categories.

Re-Review of Previously Approved Cases: USCIS may re-review certain previously approved benefits for nationals of high-risk countries who entered the U.S. on or after January 20, 2021, which may include mandatory interviews.

Q6. What is happening with Operation PARRIS?

Operation PARRIS is a DHS initiative focused on non-U.S. citizens who entered the United States as refugees, particularly those with pending refugee-based I-485 (Application to Register Permanent Residence or Adjust Status) applications.

More recent practice observations suggest that DHS is no longer re-interviewing all refugees as a matter of course. Instead, individuals appear to be selected for re-interview based on case-specific issues, such as prior denials, Requests for Evidence (RFEs), or other aspects of the case that raise processing concerns. There are also reports that DHS may be discontinuing the current re-interview initiative altogether, though no formal confirmation has been issued.

Almost none of AHR-placed cases involve refugees, meaning it remains unlikely that AHR-placed cases will be directly affected by Operation PARRIS.

Q7. My client wants or intends to travel. What should I tell them?

We are recommending attorneys advise clients to **avoid** flight travel (domestic and international) if possible.

Domestic travel: While domestic flight is technically allowed for asylum applicants with pending decisions, at this time we are generally advising clients avoid U.S. airports when possible. ICE and ERO have recently been deployed to many airports across the U.S. to supposedly support airport operations while the government shutdown persists. This concern is in addition to the already confirmed information sharing between the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and ICE. There are reports that ICE and or ERO may remain stationed at some airports even after the government shutdown ends.

If clients do not, or, cannot abide by this recommendation and decide to travel by air, please note the REAL ID is now required to fly domestically and inform the client that they should ensure their flight path remains over United States territory at all times.

International travel: Even for those clients who may be otherwise eligible, either to apply for documents permitting, or, for international travel itself, **we are strongly urging against pursuing international travel at this time.** CBP has inherent discretion to deny re-entry into the U.S. to any non-U.S. citizen, meaning even those non-U.S. citizens with valid travel documents and/or approved advanced parole could be denied admittance to the U.S. upon their return.

HOW TO SUPPORT CLIENTS DURING PERIODS OF INCREASED IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT

AHR has received many messages expressing anxiety about this administration's policies affecting immigrants and their families. AHR emphasizes that asylum and other protections from removal are grounded in international human rights instruments and due process rights enshrined in the Constitution and domestic statutes. Here /are some reminders to:

- **Maintain clear, regular communication.** Regular check-ins with your client are important, as situations may arise that require rapid contact with noncitizen clients;

- **Regularly check case status for pending cases.** Establish a routine for checking USCIS case status using the [egov website](#) to monitor for any updates, notices, or changes and to ensure timely responses if action is required.
- **Create a Safety Plan.** AHR sent out an email on Wednesday, January 28, 2026, with the subject line: “Action Items for Volunteer Attorneys,” that includes guidance on how to help your client prepare. If you did not receive this email or have further questions, please reach out to your AHR contact person;
- **Expect Delays.** Holds remain until USCIS completes its review and issues further guidance. Applicants should keep contact information updated and prepare for possible re/interviews;
- **Consider applying for multiple forms of protection for eligible clients.** Some noncitizens are potentially eligible for multiple forms of status and/or work authorization (e.g., asylum and TPS). It is true that applying for other forms of protection can sometimes slow down asylum processing, particularly for asylum seekers in removal proceedings. On the other hand, the client may benefit from acting now to secure multiple forms of protection, should the current administration curtail future eligibility for relief. Discuss this risk calculus with your clients. If your client does want to apply for an additional form of protection (like TPS), we recommend they pay all filing fees to facilitate timely receipt of the application and minimize the chance the forms are returned as rejected.

ASYLUM INTERVIEWS IN MINNESOTA

Pro bono attorneys are encouraged to reach out to Staff Attorney and Affirmative Asylum Contact, Jillian Brown (jbrown@advrights.org), when they receive notice of a scheduled interview.

Asylum Interview Key Reminders:

- **Location:** The Chicago Asylum Office conducts affirmative asylum interviews at the Warren E. Burger Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse in St. Paul (316 Robert Street North, Suite 252, St. Paul, MN 55101). Please review interview notices carefully to ensure attorneys, applicants, and interpreters have the correct location;
- **Interpreters:** Applicants must bring their own interpreter to the asylum interview. The interpreter must be over the age of 18, cannot be a witness or derivative on the case, and cannot have their own pending asylum application;
- **Sworn Statements:** Sworn statements may be taken at the officer’s discretion for mandatory bar, public safety, or national security concerns. Always request a copy of any sworn statements after your client’s interview.

CHICAGO ASYLUM OFFICE CONTACTS AND REMINDERS

Chicago Asylum Office Contact Information:

Address: 181 W. Madison Street, Suite 3000, Chicago, IL 60602

Phone: (312) 849-5200 | Fax: (312) 849-5201

General: Chicago.Asylum@uscis.dhs.gov

Director: Darice Alvertos, darice.i.alvertos@uscis.dhs.gov

Deputy Director: Elizabeth Galliano, elizabeth.a.galliano@uscis.dhs.gov

Affirmative Asylum Lead: Jennifer Lorio, jennifer.c.lorio@uscis.dhs.gov

APSO Lead: Amy Stern, amy.g.stern@uscis.dhs.gov

OAR/OAW (Afghan) Lead: Brendan Corcoran, brendan.d.corcoran@uscis.dhs.gov

Asylum Case Processing Key Reminders:

- **To add a derivative applicant** after the principal's interview but before decision, submit written request with updated I-589, passport photo, and proof of relationship to the General Chicago Asylum Office email (see above);
- **For cases transferred to EOIR**, Asylum Office will file the I-589 and supplemental evidence via ECAS; attorneys with G-28 will receive notice. Email the Chicago Asylum office for transfer issues.
- **Credible Fear (CF) & Reasonable Fear (RF) Program:** As of February 18, 2025, Asylum District 3 (ZAP) assumed oversight of the CF/RF caseload (detained and non-detained), though the Chicago Asylum Office continues to implement the program. Use the following contacts:
 - Non-detained reschedule requests:
 - AsylumD3NonDetainedScheduling@uscis.dhs.gov
 - Case status inquiries, G-28 submissions, and general inquiries:
 - AsylumD3Prescreening@uscis.dhs.gov
 - Requests for Reconsideration (RFR):
 - AsylumD3RFR@uscis.dhs.gov

How to submit **General Inquiries**:

- Email the Chicago Asylum Office's general email:
Chicago.Asylum@uscis.dhs.gov
 - For all affirmative asylum cases (except OAR/OAW), copy Jennifer Lorio, jennifer.c.lorio@uscis.dhs.gov
 - For OAR/OAW cases, copy Brendan Corcoran, brendan.d.corcoran@uscis.dhs.gov

How to submit **Pre-Interview Submissions**:

- Best practice is to submit supplemental materials and additional documents at least one week before the scheduled interview;
- Always bring copies of pre-interview submissions to the interview;

- **For online-filed cases:** submit materials via myUSCIS online portal;
- **For paper-filed cases:** submit materials by mail and via email:
 - Mailing address: 181 W. Madison Street, Suite 3000, Chicago, IL 60602
 - Email address: Chicago.Asylum@uscis.dhs.gov
 - Include applicant's name, A-number, and interview date in subject line;
 - For all affirmative asylum cases (except OAR/OAW), copy Jennifer Lorio, jennifer.c.lorio@uscis.dhs.gov
 - For OAR/OAW cases, copy Brendan Corcoran, brendan.d.corcoran@uscis.dhs.gov

How to submit Expedite Requests:

- Provide an explanation* for the request and any supporting evidence;
- Submit expedite requests by mail and via email:
 - Mailing address: 181 W. Madison Street, Suite 3000, Chicago, IL 60602
 - Email address: Chicago.Asylum@uscis.dhs.gov
 - Include applicant's name and A-number in subject line;
 - For all affirmative asylum cases (except OAR/OAW), copy Jennifer Lorio, jennifer.c.lorio@uscis.dhs.gov
 - For OAR/OAW cases, copy Brendan Corcoran, brendan.d.corcoran@uscis.dhs.gov

*Expedite requests are evaluated on a case-by-case basis, considering health, family circumstances, financial hardship, and other relevant factors.

How to submit Interview Reschedule Requests:

- Provide the reason(s) for the reschedule request (i.e. why the applicant or attorney cannot appear on scheduled date);
- Submit interview reschedule requests by mail and via email:
 - Mailing address: 181 W. Madison Street, Suite 3000, Chicago, IL 60602
 - Email address: Chicago.Asylum@uscis.dhs.gov
 - Include applicant's name, A-number, and interview date in subject line;
- NOTE: UAC cases receive one interview reschedule as a matter of discretion.