

**AILA / CHICAGO ASYLUM OFFICE LIAISON MEETING**  
**JUNE 29, 2017 · 11:00 A.M.**

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**TVPRA**

1. How many TVPRA asylum applicants have been interviewed since October 1, 2016?

*See attached statistics.*

2. How many TVPRA asylum cases have been adjudicated since October 1, 2016?

*See attached statistics.*

3. How many TVPRA asylum cases are currently pending awaiting a decision?

*See attached statistics.*

4. Are there any procedural changes in light of the new Executive Orders or due to new Headquarter directives?

*The AO has not received notice of any procedural changes based upon the new Executive Orders or Headquarter directives.*

**REASONABLE/CREDIBLE FEAR**

5. How many credible fear interviews have been conducted since October 1, 2016?

*See attached statistics.*

6. How many reasonable fear interviews have been conducted since October 1, 2016?

*See attached statistics.*

7. How many individuals are currently waiting to receive a credible/reasonable fear interview?

*See attached statistics.*

8. How many individuals are currently waiting to receive a credible/reasonable fear decision?

*See attached statistics.*

9. Are there any procedural changes in light of the new Executive Orders or due to new Headquarter directives?

*The AO has not received notice of any procedural changes based upon the new Executive Orders or Headquarter directives.*

## **ASYLUM**

10. How many asylum cases have been adjudicated since October 1, 2016?

*See attached statistics.*

11. How many grants/denials/referrals?

*See attached statistics.*

12. Any new trends in asylum cases? Has the asylum office seen an influx of cases from any particular region of the world?

*No, there are no trends from specific regions of the world. There is a general increase in applications from all geographical areas.*

13. Are there any procedural changes in light of the new Executive Orders or due to new Headquarter directives?

*The AO has not received notice of any procedural changes based upon the new Executive Orders or Headquarter directives.*

14. Chapter members report that the Asylum Office has experienced difficulties with the biometrics machine requiring applicants to return to be fingerprinted at a later time. This has created some difficulties for applicants, especially unaccompanied children, who have to travel several hours and depend on others for transportation. Is there another way these applicants may complete this biometrics requirement i.e. through a biometrics appointment with the local biometrics office?

*The AO experienced system-wide computer issues earlier in the year that were just recently resolved. Generally the AO does not interview applicants if biometrics have not been taken. Recognizing the significant burden on Applicants, the AO implemented a work-around where the applicant is called back to complete biometrics at a later date and the interview is conducted as scheduled..*

*The biometrics collection system for the AO is completely different from the 10 digit biometrics system for the service centers. Therefore the AO cannot access, let alone control, biometrics scheduling at ASC offices closer to the Applicants' homes. The AO is*

*fully understanding of the inconvenience and stress this places on Applicants and requests the chapter's patience on this issue.*

15. Chapter members are experiencing delays in receiving I-589 receipts from the Nebraska Service Center. For example, receipt notices have not been received for applications filed during the first week of May. Is the AO aware of any systemic delays in receipting?

*The AO is aware of continued receipting issues with the Nebraska Service Center and has brought this issue to the attention of headquarters on two occasions. Headquarters has assured the AO they are aware of the problem..*

16. Chapter members who choose to hand deliver written requests for interview rescheduling report AO desk staff refusing to file-stamp the attorney copy. Is this a new policy at the AO? If so, can you please provide insight into why an attorney of record would not be permitted to have their copy of the request file-stamped?

*The AO thanks the chapter for bringing this experience to their attention. There is no change in policy and attorneys should not experience any difficulty in having their copies file-stamped at the window. Supervisors will continue to monitor front desk staff for professionalism and efficiency. In the event a chapter member or members of their office staff are refused a request to stamp documents, please ask for a supervisor at that time.*

17. Chapter members continue to regularly experience 90-150 minute delays to be called for interviews; particularly those scheduled for the 9:30 a.m. or 9:45 a.m. interview slots. How long should an attorney wait before seeking supervisory assistance in these instances? Are there any identifiable reasons for why these particular interview slots experience such significant delays?

*The AO attributes significant delays in wait times to several factors:*

- *Computer system issues detailed in question #14 which led to significant back-up at the front desk during checking in.*
- *The AO has many new officers and they naturally take longer to conduct interviews due to the inherent learning curve.*
- *Promptness of both attorneys and applicants to appear for their asylum interviews as scheduled.*
- *Law firms with multiple cases scheduled to be heard in the same day "sharing" interpreters and therefore delaying subsequent interviews.*

*Should chapter members experience wait times in excess of 45 minutes, please ask to speak with a supervisor. The AO continues to take steps to improve efficiency at all points of contact including, but not limited to: hiring additional security personnel, completing repairs to security machinery, increasing front desk staff, and ongoing training of new officers to make interviews more efficient.*

18. Can the AO provide a timeline for the review of cases previously handled by DeKelaita and Associates? Specifically, is there a timeline where the asylum case was approved and the applicant is waiting to conclude their adjustment of status? Is there anything that can be done to expedite the review of cases where Mr. DeKelaita was not the first attorney of record, did not prepare the I-589, and did not represent the applicant at the asylum interview?

*Now that Mr. DeKelaita has been sentenced the AO has requested that adjustment of status and naturalization cases affected by the investigation be expedited. At this time the AO cannot give a specific timeline for these cases and notes that chapter members should start seeing forward movement for affected cases.*

19. Chapter members report recent extended lines of questioning of applicants about payment of tolls at roadside blockades in conflict zones. Could payment of these tolls potentially trigger any national security bars?

*The AO will continue to direct lines of questioning regarding possible material support of terrorist organizations during interviews.*

20. In prior liaison meetings, the Asylum Office has stated that officers should not be limiting an attorney's representation to the closing statement at the end of the interview. In a recent interview, an attorney reported that at the beginning of the interview, the officer told her that her role was just to observe and make a closing statement. When the attorney attempted to clarify information on the I589, the officer held up his hand and told her to please stop. Since we understand that there are many new asylum officers, have new officers received training on an attorney's role during interviews? If an officer explicitly limits an attorney's role during an interview, what do you recommend the attorney do?

*The AO encourages officers to work in a professional manner at all times with counsel. Pursuant to the regulations the interviewing officer has the right to limit attorney participation during the interview to a closing statement. There is no authority which grants attorneys the right to question the applicant nor permit interjections or clarifications on behalf of the applicant. Officers will be reminded to act in a professional and courteous manner should the need to stop attorney interjection be required during an interview.*

*Please note: Officers will also be reminded to ask counsel if they have a closing statement or any additional questions or information (at the officer's discretion) prior to disconnecting from the interpreter-monitor on the phone and beginning security questions.*

21. In past years, AILA has raised concerns about officers questioning applicants regarding the duration of a rape or sexual assault. Recently, an attorney reported an officer asking an applicant how long his rape by prison guards had lasted. Our understanding from

prior meetings is that the Chicago Office does not believe that this is an appropriate question for an asylum interview. Is this understanding correct and if so, have officers received training regarding interviewing sexual assault survivors and what questions are relevant and appropriate to an asylum interview?

*The AO agrees that these lines of questioning are inappropriate and will address this issue specifically in training and continue to make this issue a priority. Chapter members should ask for a supervisor if they find that an officer is engaging in this line of questioning with an applicant.*

22. Members report an increase in the length of asylum interviews, with many interviews lasting four or more hours. Interviews that last for more than about two hours tend to be extremely exhausting for applicants and interpreters, and as applicants and interpreters become increasingly tired, the possibility of interpretation error or applicant confusion and misstatement can increase. Understanding that there will always be certain complicated interviews that require more questioning, does the Chicago Office provide guidance to officers regarding how long interviews should generally take or training and review to ensure interviews are being conducted in an efficient and effective manner?

*The AO agrees with Chapter Members that interviews should not last two (2) or more hours in duration and asks for our patience as newer officers become more efficient at conducting interviews.*

23. Members report an increase in adversarial interviews by officers in the Chicago Asylum Office. Has the Chicago Asylum Office received any new instruction from headquarters or DHS regarding the nature of asylum office interviews?

*The AO is aware of several instances in which the interviewing officer was inappropriately sharp-tongued or probative and has addressed those officers directly.*

24. The asylum office basic training course materials are no longer available on the USCIS website. Will USCIS be adding these back to the website in the near future? Why were they were taken down from the website?

*The AO has elevated the issue to HQ and are awaiting a response.*

## **NACARA**

25. How many NACARA applications are currently pending with the Chicago Asylum Office?

*See attached statistics.*

26. How many grants/denials?

*See attached statistics.*

## MISCELLANEOUS

27. Can you provide an update on any new staff and supervisory positions?

*The Chicago AO has been completely reorganized as the officer has grown substantially. They are now staffed at 50 officers. As part of the reorganization the AO has added additional supervisors and promoted officers to higher positions. The senior supervisory list for the Chicago AO is currently as follows:*

- *Director:* *Kenneth Madsen – 312.849.5225*
- *Deputy Director:* *Lisa Flanagan – 312-849-5221*
- *Branch Chief – Affirmative Asylum* *Ed Jeszka – 312.849.5210*
- *Branch Chief – CF/RF* *Joy Robinson – 312.849.5265*

*The Chicago AO has also increased the number of supervisors to 8 officers. Below please find the new supervisory list. Please direct any direct communication to the following supervisors through the general email box, postal mail, or fax:*

*Email address:* *Chicago.Asylum@uscis.dhs.gov* (must have email registration on file to receive response)

*Fax:* *312-849-5201*

*Mailing address:* *181 W. Madison St.  
Suite 3000  
Chicago, Illinois 60602*

- *Darice Avlertos* *NACARA/Affirmative Asylum*
- *Rebecca Lown* *Affirmative Asylum*
- *Rana Curry* *Affirmative Asylum*
- *Consuelo Botti* *Affirmative Asylum*
- *Christina Fairbank* *CF/RF/Affirmative Asylum*
- *Amy Stern* *CF/RF*

- *Maura Hagen* *CF/RF/Affirmative Asylum*
- *Elizabeth Galiano* *Training/CF/RF*

**The next AILA Asylum Office Liaison Meeting will be held on Thursday August 24, 2017 at 10:00 a.m. at the Chicago Asylum Office. The meeting is open to all Chicago Chapter AILA members. All questions must be submitted to Amanda Crews Slezak by email to [ACrews@heartlandalliance.org](mailto:ACrews@heartlandalliance.org) by Friday, August 18, 2017 no later than 3:00 p.m.**