Proskauer

Immigration Update: Violence and Poverty Continue to Fuel Border Surge

Proskauer For Good on **April 18, 2024**

In the months since Proskauer hosted its immigration panel discussion in partnership with Sanctuary for Families this past January, the influx of migrants across the U.S. southern border has continued. So has the dire need for pro bono legal services for these new arrivals along with it. Recent U.S. Customs and Border Patrol Data indicates that the U.S. Border Patrol had almost 140,000 encounters with migrants crossing into the U.S. from Mexico in March 2024, down from a record high of nearly 250,000 in December 2023. According to the Wilson Center, 2023 marked the first year that more than half of the people reaching the border originated beyond Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries of Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala. From our own recent experience, we have seen this trend continue.

In response, Proskauer has redoubled its commitment to providing pro bono legal services to immigrants who have recently arrived in New York City and in the United States more broadly. The Firm seeks to help address the urgent need for pro bono immigration support, which is growing by the day and becoming increasingly fraught given the ever-growing political controversy surrounding the influx of migrants at the border.

In February, Proskauer and Sanctuary for Families hosted an on-site pro se asylum application clinic, where Proskauer attorneys, alongside in-person translators, assisted eight clients in preparing and filing applications for asylum. The clinic provided a small window into the experiences of the many migrants currently seeking asylum in the United States. All clients who attended the clinic were victims of domestic violence and fled to the United States to escape persecution and danger in their home countries, which included Nicaragua, Venezuela, Ecuador, Colombia and Brazil. Heartbreakingly, a number of these clients were targeted, discriminated against, and violently attacked for their identities as transgender women or LGBTQ+ individuals, often by their own family members. Law enforcement did nothing to protect them. Some were also targeted for their participation in political protests against repressive governments and/or by gangs that their home countries' governments were unable or unwilling to control.

Proskauer attorneys have also continued to volunteer at New York City's Asylum Application Help Center, which, as of March 2024, had helped clients file more than 37,000 applications for temporary protected status (TPS), asylum and work authorization. About 180,000 migrants have come to New York City since April 2022. Volunteering at the Asylum Application Help Center last fall, I worked with a woman seeking asylum for herself and her young child on the basis of her imputed political opinion opposing the Venezuelan government. Indeed, the political unrest in Venezuela is so severe that in September 2023, Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas announced the extension and redesignation for TPS (a temporary immigration status granted to individuals who cannot return home safely due to conditions in their home country) for Venezuela for 18 months. The Asylum Application Help Center has helped nearly all TPS-eligible Venezuelans living in city shelters file for TPS, a total of over 10,000 applications.

Proskauer attorneys also continue to take on individual representation of asylum seekers, often working with clients fleeing gang violence, which makes it impossible to live safely and raise children in their home countries. The Firm also continues to prioritize helping LGBTQ+ individuals, partnering with organizations such as HIAS and Immigration Equality to provide direct representation and prepare country conditions reports to support applicants fleeing danger on the basis of their LGBTQ+ identities.

As long as conditions in the countries migrants are escaping from do not change, the flow of immigrants fleeing danger and violence into the United States will continue. It will be incumbent upon us as attorneys to support them in their quest for safety and security.

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