

# Pro Bono for Immigrant Families: Protecting Access to Counsel

Proskauer For Good Blog on September 12, 2019

Last week, Proskauer — along with co-counsel [Democracy Forward](#), and the [Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.](#) — filed a [complaint](#) on behalf of seven asylum seekers, their minor children and the legal services organization [RAICES](#) in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, claiming that several current immigration directives impede access to counsel for asylum seekers fleeing persecution.

A [credible fear interview](#) is the first critical step for immigrants claiming asylum who have been placed in expedited removal proceedings. Accordingly, an asylum seeker's case for refuge in the United States turns on the effective presentation of their asylum claim at this important interview.

The asylum directives challenged in this lawsuit impact procedures designed to ensure that asylum seekers understand their rights and have the opportunity to adequately consult with counsel prior to their credible fear interview. Specifically, the directives:

- Significantly reduce the time asylum seekers have to consult a lawyer and prepare evidence to substantiate their fear of persecution.
- Prohibit asylum seekers from obtaining a continuance except in extraordinary circumstances. Specifically, continuances are no longer granted when additional time is needed to prepare for the interview or overcome language barriers.

The directives were first implemented at the South Texas Family Residential Center in Dilley, Texas, and subsequently at the Karnes County Residential Center in Karnes City, Texas. Both are family detention centers housing women and children primarily from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, who have experienced severe forms of violence and trauma.

In addition to myself, the Proskauer team includes partner [Samuel J. Waldon](#) and associates [Elisa Carino](#), [Monique Curry](#), [Tony Martinez](#), and [Hena Vora](#).

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- **William C. Silverman**

Pro Bono Partner