



ASYLUM SEEKER ADVOCACY PROJECT

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Immigration Advocates Seek Emergency Order to Protect Lives & Rights Amid Global Pandemic

*Motion Challenges the Reckless Operation of the Immigration Courts
Despite the Current Public Health Crisis*

WASHINGTON, DC – The Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project (ASAP), Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC), Innovation Law Lab (Law Lab), Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center, Santa Fe Dreamers Project (SFDP), and Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), with the pro bono assistance of Perkins Coie, have filed for an emergency order challenging the reckless operation of the immigration courts despite the current public health crisis. If granted, the federal court's emergency order would mandate that immigration courts around the country adopt court policies and procedures that protect public health and preserve immigrants' rights.

"Asylum seekers are being put in the impossible position of deciding between their health and their right to seek protection in this county," said **Dennise Moreno, Equal Justice Works Fellow at the Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project (ASAP)**. "We as advocates are calling on immigration courts to keep the public safe and stop issuing deportation orders when asylum seekers and advocates make the responsible decision to stay home."

In December, organizations filed a [lawsuit](#), challenging the weaponization of the nation's immigration court system to serve the Trump administration's anti-immigrant agenda. Those organizations are now going before the court to ask that a temporary restraining order be issued requiring immigration courts take appropriate measures to protect the health of immigrants, attorneys, court staff, and the public without jeopardizing the rights of people in removal proceedings. Plaintiffs are asking that the immigration courts extend deadlines, adopt appropriate safety measures, and ensure that immigrants' cases are not prejudiced by court policies during the current national emergency.

"The immigration court's refusal to adopt policies that protect the health of respondents, lawyers, judges, and immigration court staff during the current pandemic forces immigrant families and their lawyers to make an impossible decision: endanger public health or risk being deported," **said Nadia Dahab, Senior Litigation Attorney at Innovation Law Lab.**

"We are in the middle of a global pandemic, but the immigration court system is continuing to operate as if it's 'business as usual,'" **said Melissa Crow, senior supervising attorney with the Southern Poverty Law Center's Immigrant Justice Project.** "The government has turned the court system into a public health hazard. It is hard not to see this as part of their ongoing efforts to rig the system against asylum seekers and other immigrants who just want a full and fair opportunity to present their claims."

The lawsuit filed late last year alleged pervasive dysfunction and bias within the immigration court system, including:

- The growth of "asylum-free zones," where virtually no asylum claims have been granted for the past several years;
- A nationwide backlog of pending immigration cases, which has now surpassed 1 million;
- An Enforcement Metrics Policy, implemented last year, which gives judges a personal financial stake in every case they decide and pushes them to deny more cases more quickly; and
- The creation of a "family unit" court docket, which stigmatizes the cases of recently arrived families and rushes their court dates, often giving families inadequate time to find an attorney and prepare for their hearings.

Today's filing can be found [HERE](#).

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The Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project (ASAP) is a nonprofit immigrants' rights organization that represents individuals who have arrived at the Mexico-U.S. border to seek asylum, regardless of where they are currently located. ASAP's model has three components: online community support, emergency legal aid, and nationwide systemic reform. Learn more at asylumadvocacy.org and follow us on social media: Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project on [Facebook](#), Twitter [@asylumadvocacy](#) and Instagram [@asylumadvocacy](#).

Innovation Law Lab, based in Portland, Oregon with projects around the country and in Mexico, is a nonprofit organization that harnesses technology, lawyers, and activists to advance immigrant justice. For more information, visit www.innovationlawlab.org.

The Southern Poverty Law Center, based in Alabama with offices in Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi and Washington, D.C., is a nonprofit civil rights organization dedicated to fighting hate and bigotry, and to seeking justice for the most vulnerable members of society. For more information, see www.splcenter.org and follow us on social media: Southern Poverty Law Center on Facebook and [@splcenter](#) on Twitter.