



AMERICAN COLLEGE OF TRIAL LAWYERS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

American College of Trial Lawyers Opposes Weakening of Program Vital to the Operation of Immigration Courts

NEWPORT BEACH, CALIFORNIA (May 25, 2026) – The American College of Trial Lawyers (ACTL) opposes efforts to undermine a longstanding program essential to the fair and efficient administration of justice. ACTL expresses its strong support for the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) Recognition and Accreditation (R&A) Program and urges the DOJ and Congress to continue their long-standing bipartisan support of this program.

The DOJ R&A Program, in existence for over 60 years, trains and accredits non-lawyer organizations and representatives who help guide immigrants through the complex United States immigration system. These trained and accredited non-lawyers assist individuals with applications for asylum, visas, work permits, naturalization (citizenship), and with appearances in court proceedings. There are currently over 2,600 accredited representatives across over 900 recognized agencies. This program is vital for the smooth operation of judicial proceedings and for access to justice by those individuals who are unable to afford representation by lawyers.

ACTL has become aware that the DOJ has impaired the effectiveness of the R&A Program. As reported by CBS News and other respected news outlets, the DOJ's Executive Office of Immigration Review, which administers the Program, has abruptly reassigned the handful of senior attorneys who operate the Program to work in immigration courts, leaving almost no one with legal authority to approve or renew accreditation applications.

After the re-assignment of senior attorneys who operated the Program, it is now imperative that DOJ train enough appropriately qualified staff and give them legal authority to approve or renew accreditation applications. Without adequate staffing, organizations and representatives cannot realistically apply for credentials, and even routine renewals required to maintain good standing cannot be reviewed.

The impact on our nation's courts is deeply concerning. Historically, the R&A Program has reduced court backlogs, prevented fraud, and ensured access to justice for immigrants. Today, more than 11 million applications remain pending before the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) agency with another 3.3 million cases pending before



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immigration courts. This is not the time to impair one of our country's most effective and affordable access to justice programs or to further burden judges and court staff already managing overwhelming dockets involving self-represented individuals. Nor is it the time to impair a longstanding program intended to ensure that judicial decisions are made based on the merits of the claim and not based on procedural defaults by self-represented individuals.

Supporting access to justice is integral to ACTL's mission. The College devotes significant resources each year to access to justice issues and Fellows of the College often partner with public-interest organizations, including participants in the R&A Program.

The American College of Trial Lawyers calls upon elected officials and the DOJ to take the following steps without delay: 1) ensure that the Program is adequately staffed; 2) restore the historical 90-day standard for processing applications; and 3) resume meaningful stakeholder engagement between the R&A Program administrators and the communities that depend on the Program.

About The American College of Trial Lawyers

The American College of Trial Lawyers comprises the best of the trial bar from the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico and is widely considered to be the premier professional trial organization in North America. Founded in 1950, the College is an invitation only fellowship. The College thoroughly investigates each nominee for admission and selects only those who have demonstrated the very highest standards of trial advocacy, ethical conduct, integrity, professionalism and collegiality. The College maintains and seeks to improve the standards of trial practice, professionalism, ethics, and the administration of justice through education and public statements on important legal issues relating to its mission. The College strongly supports the independence of the judiciary, trial by jury, respect for the rule of law, access to justice, and fair and just representation of all parties to legal proceedings.

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