



ASAP Members Sue USCIS for Unlawful Delays in Renewal of Work Permits

WASHINGTON, DC —Five members of the Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project (ASAP) filed a national lawsuit today challenging extreme delays at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) in processing work permit renewals for asylum seekers.

Plaintiffs include a medical doctor treating underserved rural populations, a long-haul truck driver, a food services manager, a technology worker, and a behavioral health care worker for special needs children. Each plaintiff is currently seeking asylum based on persecution in their home country. Despite nationwide labor shortages in each of these industries, the plaintiffs have lost or will lose their jobs because USCIS has delayed renewing their work authorization—sometimes taking ten months or more to approve.

One of the plaintiffs in the case, **Dayana Vera de Aponte, a Venezuelan asylum seeker and member of the Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project (ASAP)** shared: "In the six years I have lived in this country, I have always had my livelihood in my own hands—until now. Because of the government's delay in processing my work permit renewal, my patients are left without their therapist—a change which does not help their condition, my family is left without its main source of support, and I am left helpless until my work permit is renewed. I hope this injustice can be made right through this lawsuit—and that no other asylum seeker will face the uncertainty and instability I have felt waiting for my ability to work to be restored."

The lawsuit, filed in the federal district court in the Northern District of California by the American Immigration Council, the Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project (ASAP), and Lakin & Wille LLP, seeks to force USCIS to address delays and timely adjudicate work permit renewal applications for asylum seekers.

"ASAP's members are suing USCIS because the government's unreasonable delays have caused them to lose their jobs in the middle of a pandemic," said **Zachary Manfredi, litigation director at the Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project (ASAP)**. "The Plaintiffs here are not only seeking to represent themselves, but through their courageous advocacy are hoping to protect all asylum seekers from suffering from these delays—and losing their livelihoods, their health insurance, and the ability to provide for their families."

“Loss of employment authorization not only limits asylum seekers’ ability to work, but it is a prerequisite to health insurance and certain professional licensure, and to obtain a driver’s license in most states said **Emma Winger, staff attorney at the American Immigration Council**. “Work authorization provides support and stability that is key for asylum seekers who are often suffering from trauma and are less likely to have access to other means of financial support.”

According to the complaint filed in court Wednesday, “USCIS has already determined that each of these asylum seekers are authorized to work... Plaintiffs seek to renew their employment authorization document so they may maintain or resume their employment and support themselves and their families while awaiting adjudication of their asylum claims.”

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