

Immigration lawyers swamped in wake of travel ban



Attorneys Kim Beis, left, and Iman Boundaoui, center, confer Feb. 4, 2017, at a makeshift office for volunteer attorneys inside the international terminal at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport. The lawyers came to support travelers attempting to enter the country from seven countries identified in President Donald Trump's travel ban. (Erin Hooley / Chicago Tribune)

By **Robert Channick**

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While President **Donald Trump's** suspended travel ban may be up in the air, one thing is certain: His executive order has put the field of immigration law front and center.

"It's extremely busy. I'm fielding a lot more calls than I normally would, not only from new clients, but also from clients who have pretty settled legal status," said Michael Jarecki, a Chicago immigration attorney. "I even have Canadian citizens who have status in the United States call me and say, 'Can I go back to Canada? What's the likelihood that the borders are going to be shut?'"

The executive order, issued Jan. 27 with the intention of protecting the U.S. from foreign terrorists, temporarily barred entry for people from seven predominantly Muslim countries: Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen. It also suspended resettlement in the U.S. of refugees from around the world.

The order precipitated chaotic scenes at airports across the U.S. that weekend, including Chicago's O'Hare International Airport. Responding to calls from the International Refugee Assistance Project, lawyers flocked to airports, offering assistance to the families of stranded travelers.

On Friday, a Seattle federal judge temporarily blocked the immigration order. A federal appeals court was scheduled to hear arguments Tuesday on whether to reinstate the ban.

Despite the uncertainty of the travel ban, lawyers with immigration know-how are in high demand, both by companies with deep pockets and families of modest means.

Marketa Lindt, a Chicago business immigration lawyer and a vice president of the 14,000-member American Immigration Lawyers Association, said confusion is the order of the day for many companies seeking to recruit and maintain foreign talent.

"We've had many calls from both the companies we work with as well as their foreign national employees, asking how the travel ban affects employees, and whether they need to cancel their own family or business travel — even if they're from countries other than the seven named in the executive order," Lindt said.

For family-based immigration issues, the legal aspects of the travel ban are complicated by the limited financial resources available for many of those affected. Attorneys are stepping up.

On Thursday, a seminar to train corporate attorneys from Chicago law firms on immigration law drew a record 130 attendees, said Tara Tidwell Cullen, a spokeswoman for the National Immigrant Justice Center, a Chicago-based nonprofit that provides pro bono legal services for low-income immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

"About 100 of them registered after the travel ban went into place," Cullen said. "They realized they can play an really important role in helping immigrants who are going to be targeted by the Trump administration."

Sioban Albiol heads the Asylum & Immigration Law Clinic at the [DePaul University](#) College of Law, which works directly with thousands of refugees and immigrants each year and conducts training for immigration attorneys.

Albiol said demand for training has extended beyond lawyers as more restrictive immigration policies take shape under the Trump administration.

"Since the election, I have seen interest not just from attorneys but from other professionals who wish to get information and training in order to serve immigrant and refugee communities," Albiol said in an email Tuesday.

Beyond the travel ban, Trump's oft-repeated campaign pledge to deport up to 3 million undocumented immigrants has created an acute need for removal defense attorneys, according to Shira Scheindlin, a former federal judge from New York who co-founded the American Immigrant Representation Project after the November election.

The project sent out a solicitation letter Friday to more than 300 lawyers, asking for financial donations and volunteers to provide legal representation.

"We asked for money and we asked for volunteers — we're getting both," Scheindlin said Tuesday. "We already have more than 50 volunteers and more than \$300,000."

While the deportation issue may be flying under the radar somewhat as opposition forces focus on the more immediate travel ban, Scheindlin said Trump's executive order has "energized" the legal community to support her project.

For immigrants who can afford to hire legal representation, the phone calls have been fast and furious since the travel ban was enacted, according to Erin Cobb, 39, a Chicago immigration attorney.

"I'm seeing phone calls from some clients who received citizenship years ago, who aren't from any of the seven countries, who are now afraid to travel out of the country to visit their family, because they don't know what's going to happen," Cobb said.

The ramifications of the travel ban are far-reaching. Nearly 100 U.S. technology companies filed a brief with the appeals court Sunday opposing the ban and arguing the order "disrupts ongoing business operations" and "threatens companies' ability to attract talent, business, and investment to the United States."

Amy McCormack, a Chicago-based legal recruiter, expects employment opportunities for immigration lawyers to increase during the Trump administration.

"I suspect everyone in the immigration space has been gearing up since the election," McCormack said in an email Monday. "We have not seen a real uptick in law firm hiring of immigration lawyers yet, but it would not surprise me if it happens."

McCormack said business immigration attorneys in particular should be in high demand in the coming months as larger corporations navigate the ramifications of potential travel restrictions on their workforce.

While business may be booming, Jarecki said "there are enough immigration attorneys out there" to handle the paid workload, citing pro bono services as the most pressing need. It's a demand he expects to keep rising if the travel ban is upheld.

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