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The Slow Crisis in America's Immigration Courts

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Detainees are transferred out of the holding area after being processed at the Tucson Sector of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection headquarters in Tucson, Ariz.
(Ross D. Franklin / AP Images)

Aug 11, 2017

The American immigration courts determine the fates of hundreds of thousands of people each year. But they function unlike almost any other courts in the United States: no clerk, no bailiff, no court reporter, and with judges who serve at the behest of the Department of Justice. Moreover, judicial decisions are often unpublished, dockets are only viewable in person and courtrooms are only accessible under certain conditions. This makes the courts notoriously difficult to understand at a time when the system is in crisis: with over 600,000 cases pending, only 333 federal immigration judges and wait times of up to 5 years, the courts are overburdened and have left many immigrants living in a state of uncertainty or worse.

First, Bob speaks with journalist [Julia Preston](#), who writes about immigration for [the Marshall Project](#), about the challenges she faces accessing courtrooms and tracking cases. Then, he speaks with immigration Judge Dana Leigh Marks in her capacity as President of the [National Association of Immigration Judges](#) about what it means to be a judge in an under-resourced and counter-intuitively governed system.

ON THE MEDIA

WNYC's weekly investigation into how the media shapes our world view. Brooke Gladstone and Bob Garfield give you the tools to survive the media maelstrom.

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