



## **NAIJ Policy on Legal Representation for Vulnerable Populations**

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The National Association of Immigration Judges (NAIJ) was founded in 1971 as a voluntary organization with the objectives of promoting independence and enhancing professionalism, dignity, and efficiency in the Immigration Court. Today we are the recognized representative for collective bargaining, representing the corps of trial level Immigration Judges, which currently number approximately 275 judges in 59 courts throughout the United States and Puerto Rico.

The Immigration Court is facing the challenge of an unprecedented caseload with increasingly limited resources, all the while being tasked with applying a highly complex body of law in settings which involve emotionally charged questions and result in life altering determinations. Those who appear in Immigration Court unrepresented are often uneducated in our language, culture and law, but are nevertheless required to present their claims unaided, while the DHS is represented by skilled government attorneys. This challenge becomes much more difficult when a respondent is a member of a vulnerable group, such as juvenile or mentally impaired individuals.

*Pro Bono* service providers fill an invaluable role for our Court, by educating and guiding unrepresented individuals and providing direct representation when possible. Their efforts are a huge step towards leveling the playing field in our proceedings and helping Immigration Judges assure that justice is served in each and every matter that comes before us. Their presence is judicially economic as cases can be decided more expeditiously without compromising due process or risking erroneous determinations. The important contribution of counsel to the process should not be underestimated. NAIJ endorses efforts to provide free legal services to those appearing before the Immigration Court, especially vulnerable populations such as the mental impaired or juveniles.