## Notes for 12/16/2021 Houston Asylum Office Community Engagement Meeting

**Asylum Office updates:**

Lubna Fazal is interim deputy director.

Irvin Gadson is Acting director.

Stakeholders from Colorado joining today. About 60 RSVPs today.

Words of gratitude to the community for feedback, patience, cooperation.

Acknowledge the difficulties created by the affirmative backlog.

**Irvin Gadson’s remarks:**

* 120 asylum officers in Houston and San Antonio area.
* Cover 10 states with the NOLA office for eastern states
* They are hiring for backlog, Afghans, and new regs to come
	+ New regs to streamline asylum process within a matter of month. CFIs could move to application outside of court, through the asylum office
* Re-implementation of MPP in El Paso. Others locations will come online soon. Need staff.
* New office project: delays due to the pandemic and supply chains issue. In about a month, they will move about a mile from where they are. They will occupy 3 floors. Great improvement.
* San Antonio sub-office project – about two years away.

**Office updates**

* Management team:
	+ Charity Mireles- affirmative program coordinator
	+ Sean Waxman - affirmative program coordinator
	+ Paul Chang – supervisor and affirmative coordinator
	+ Kathleen Jones APSO coord also supervi ao
	+ Jennifer cox training coordinator
	+ Brian Hemming – section chief
* Circuit rides have not resumed to date.
	+ Currently in the planning stages for resuming interviews
* Scheduling policy:
	+ Still LIFO
		- First priority: applications that were rescheduled
		- Second priority: applications pending 21 days or less
		- All other pending asylum applications
	+ UAC cases are subject to the same guidelines
	+ Not keeping up with receipts in Houston – adding to the backlog
* Video Interviews since June 2020
* Face to face interviews have resumed as of November 2021
	+ Social distancing
	+ Plexiglass barriers
	+ Video interviews on a limited basis
		- Email public box explaining the reasons (health) to request one
		- Also if there are too many people to maintain social distancing
* Duty supervisory asylum officer every day to check applicants in and field questions
* Affirmative time slots every 30 mn from 7.30 to 9.30 am
* Check in at least 30 mn prior to scheduled time
* Pilot project for remote attorney participation: request at least 10 days
* All decisions are mailed out currently
* What to bring to the interviews:
	+ Photo ID, including passports, even expired
	+ G-28 if attending attorney is not the attorney of record
	+ No need for an interpreter
		- Provided by USCIS in 47 languages
		- List can be found on the USCIS asylum webpage
* Special Requests
	+ Submit in writing with as much advanced notice as possible, at least a week
		- Female officer, presence of observer, video facilitated interview
* Recording policy:
	+ Recording, including photos, is prohibited
	+ Cellphone use is allowed in common area
	+ But turn off cellphone during the interview
	+ Attorneys may use laptop for notetaking
		- Will need to sign a form
* How to reschedule:
	+ Made in writing – mail or email
		- Public inquiry mailbox
	+ No in person request since front desk remains closed
	+ Include reason for request
	+ First request is usually granted
	+ Subsequent request – need to show good cause
* Supporting documentation:
	+ Prefer filed with the initial application
	+ Otherwise two copies filed at least one week prior to the interview
	+ Day of submissions might delay the interview
	+ Include interview day and time if available at the time
* Change of address:
	+ AR11 online or by mail
	+ AND change address on any pending or recently approved applications online or by phone
		- [www.uscis.gov/addresschange](http://www.uscis.gov/addresschange)
		- 1-800-375-5283 (TTY: 1-800-767-1833)
	+ AND if pending at the Houston AO, also send them the change of address by mail or email to ensure timely update
* Asylee Benefit Orientations
	+ For newly granted asylees
	+ Presented by members of refugee resettlement agencies
	+ Currently conducted virtually
	+ Usually second Thursday of each month
	+ ZHNABO@uscis.dhs.gov for question
	+ In 2022 will be conducted on the first Tuesday of every month

**Questions submitted by Houston – HILSC and AILA**

1. I would like to know if in fact, the Houston Asylum Office is the entity we write to request a location change for a biometrics appointment for a pending I-589 in court? Scenario: Client was formerly detained in Tyler, TX when her asylum application was filed. Since being released, venue was changed to Houston. I submitted the first three pages of her already filed I-589 along with a G-28 with her Houston address and other documents requested to the Nebraska Service Center. We received a biometrics appointment for 11/24 in Austin Texas. I called USCIS as her representative to try and reschedule/change location of her appointment to Houston. USCIS rep told me I had to write the Houston Asylum office to request this. The Houston Asylum Office responded, directing me to EOIR.
	1. Nebraska service center schedules the biometrics application
2. Where and how do attorneys file a change of attorney address for the Asylum Office?
	1. New G-28 with updated address via public mailbox or by mail
3. Are people who have NTA's that have **not yet been filed with the court** eligible to apply for asylum online via the USCIS website?
	1. No. individual with an NTA not yet filed should file a paper file.
4. Are we allowed to file UC (in removal) I-589s in ELIS?
	1. Refer to instruction
	2. Currently must file a paper I-589 with Nebraska Service Center
5. The last data report available on the USCIS website on initial jurisdiction cases under the TVPRA (for unaccompanied children) is from January 2020. Will updated information be released soon or has it been combined with other data reports?
	1. Consolidated stakeholder report undergoing review and we hope to release it soon but no timeline yet.
6. If a child is included as a derivative on a parent’s application but entered the U.S. unaccompanied, can that child also file an independent application as an unaccompanied child?
	1. Yes.
	2. Only principal UAC are under jurisdiction of AO
7. What is the best way to address any issues with an officer during the interview? If a follow up letter is needed, who should the letter be addressed to and what information is most helpful to include?
	1. May ask to speak with a supervisor at any point during the interview. no set protocol. It is dependent on the interview.
	2. Supervisor available every day on site or by phone at a circuit ride
	3. Any complaints in writing to the director by mail
8. We have heard that applications that were filed in 2015 are being scheduled.  What are the criteria (if any) for selecting these applications to interview?
	1. Refer to priorities pursuant to LIFO
	2. Certain categories of cases that may be scheduled outside of these requirement
		1. Listed on USCIS website (priority).

**Questions submitted by Denver, Colorado chapter and others**

* Circuit rides to Denver will hopefully resume in 2022.
* 8 hour long interviews by video:
	+ Uncommon, but the length of an interview can vary in length depending on several factors (number of I-589 changes, number of derivatives, complexity, etc…)
	+ Address issues with asylum officer directly
	+ They have received emails concerning specific cases and will respond
* One of our colleagues was told to file an RFR with NOLA office
	+ Jurisdiction of NOLA Office: Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi
* Afghan asylum cases:
	+ Does the AO have a plan to adjudicate the cases in the statutory requirement:
		- Operational preparation and additional funding
		- Will be prioritized but no separate track
		- Cases that have already been filed are being processed within 45 days
		- Very few applications received
* Video appearance for applicants?
	+ Not at this time
	+ Reschedule if necessary
* Who supervises RFI CFIs in detention centers?
	+ Logistics ICE
	+ Interview AO
* How many AOs conducting interview in detention centers in Houston?
	+ Number of officers and interviews vary according to the number of referrals
	+ Currently Houston is receiving help from other offices
		- Officers have the same training
	+ All by phones – no in person interviews
* How long to schedule RFI/CFI in detention centers in the Houston Area
	+ 14 days average from the time of referral
* Reconsideration requests for RFI/CFI?
	+ The AO may reconsider in its discretion
	+ Only after IJ review according to regulations