

**2020 - 2021
AILA
NATIONAL
ELECTION**



VOTE

NEENA DUTTA

FOR AILA SECRETARY

**VOTING BEGINS
MAY 8th, 2020**

AILA FOR ALL

- ✓ EDUCATE MEMBERS ON THE STRUCTURE OF AILA
- ✓ HELP MEMBERS MAXIMIZE MEMBERSHIP
- ✓ PREPARE FOR THE FUTURE OF IMMIGRATION AND ELECTRONIC FILING
- ✓ CREATE AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT
- ✓ PAVE THE WAY FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

Neena Dutta

For AILA Secretary



2020 Vision - AILA for ALL

When the election process began, I had a clear vision of what to say to members. Now, we are in a completely different universe, but my message remains the same - **you are not alone**.

Your voice and your vote count.

Did you know that there are almost 17,000 members and the last national AILA election had approximately 1,130 voters? Like our brains (and AILA resources and member benefits), the majority of us are only using about 10% of our AILA potential. I want to engage with members, get you excited to be an AILA member and show you how you can get the most out of the organization so that it can work for you.

The world is on fire, so why should you care about an AILA election? Simply put: There have been few times when being an immigration lawyer was more valuable or more crucial to our society. Before the COVID crisis, most AILA members were juggling their practices; navigating the horrors of Service Centers, Court and Consulates; fitting in time with their families. And now, the usual struggles pale in

comparison to our worries about our practices, our health, and our loved ones; and figuring out how to pay for it all. You need someone who recognizes these unprecedented frustrations and has solutions for the issues of member needs.

We are a bar association whose mission is to advance the interests of all of our members, from solos to large firms to non-profits. Like you, I am concerned with where the practice is going and how we are going to support each other. Technology and non-lawyers are slowly eating into our market share and I want to make sure that we all remain relevant, are represented, and that our profession remains, a profession.

You are not alone.

I am running by petition, not nomination because I believe in “AILA for All.” I ran by petition because I believe members should have a choice and deserve the opportunity to participate in this election. I have served on the Board of Governors as an elected director, for 5 years. I’ve provided an outline of AILA’s structure below to assist members. I believe the only way for us to be a sustainable organization is if we allow room for leadership from the next generation. This is why I chose not to seek reelection for an elected director position and run for a seat on the Executive Committee.



I am running for Secretary because I want to continue working for our members. I am a solo practitioner, as many of you are, at the Dutta Law Firm in NYC and special council to McElroy, Deutsch, Mulvaney and Carpenter. I am an active member of NY, TX, RDC, BDC and Global Chapters. I have been an AILA member since 2007, and my practice is business and family-based cases. I have served as Chapter Chair for New York and I have served as a Director of the Board of Governors, several local and national committees and on liaison to government agencies to improve regulatory practices and impact legislative policy. I have also represented Pro Bono clients and have volunteered at the CARA Pro Bono Project in Dilley, TX. I have made media appearances on NPR, WNYC, NY1, CGTV and I-24 News.

When I was a new AILA member, I attended meetings and became involved. The more I put in, the more I got out. I have mentored a lot of attorneys with work, developing their practice and keeping up with changes. I have always encouraged new members to become involved and have shown them a pathway of how to do so.

Recognizing our need to stay connected as immigration attorneys, at the beginning of the COVID crisis, I have coordinated with chapters, worked with members on issues facing their practice, practical issues with the PPP and locating resources, and I am proud to have shared my experience and I hope it brought solace to some people:

<https://thinkimmigration.org/blog/2020/04/06/practicing-immigration-law-in-the-covid19-era-post-4/>

Our primary objective is to keep our members working, not just during this crisis, but as the practice continues to change. We can do this together. Whether we pool resources, litigate, or continue liaison, we have the ability to make sure that AILA is at the forefront of the immigration fight on behalf of immigration lawyers.

We are all AILA.



My story is I am the child of Indian immigrants who moved to the UK, where I was born in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, and I grew up in London. I came to the US like many of your clients and have been a J-1, F-1, H-1, O-1, an EB-1... don't worry, I passed my citizenship test! You could call me a double immigrant! Starting off in Wenatchee, WA and Seattle I have ended up in New York. Not only do I represent immigrants but having had the immigrant experience myself, I understand the need for inclusion and the pressure to have to work twice as hard, and be better than everyone else in order to seek acceptance. Diversity and inclusion are words thrown around a lot, but we need to put this into practice and demonstrate to the next generation that it is true and not a platitude.

Since 2007, I have worked on liaison issues, chapter issues, conferences and worked with organizations outside of AILA to help foster relations between non-profits and the private bar, to make sure we always have a voice. But the main areas I would like to improve are:

1. Who is AILA?: The majority of members are not aware of the structure of AILA or how to navigate resources. So here is some helpful information for you to understand the structure:



- AILA National: Staff members who work directly for the organization.
 - Staff members coordinate membership, the national conferences, publications, the website, monitor government communications and release practice advisories (and much more).
- Board of Governors and Executive Committee (approximately 80 volunteer members):
 - Executive Committee is made up of 7 elected members President, President-Elect, First Vice President, Second Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary and Immediate Past President; plus, the Executive Director, *ex officio*.

- Board: Elected Directors, Chapter Chairs and Past Presidents* (*Lifetime positions unless they opt out).
- Chapter Chairs: your local chapter's Chair represents you at the board meetings.
- Local Chapters: volunteer members who were nominated or elected. Most chapters have a nominating committee and some chapters do not have contested elections. Your local chapter will have meetings, CLEs, local practice information, local conferences and events.
- MEMBERS: that is you! Members are the most important part of the organization. Without members, we are nothing. Members speak at conferences, serve on committees, attend meetings, submit experiences to liaison, contribute their time and energy to helping other members attain the best practice that they can. We have a diversity of practice areas and opinions and that is what makes us unique!

We need to get away from an “us” and “them” mentality. Who is AILA? We are. We all are- not the staff members, not the board, all of us. If people feel they are not engaged or they have no agency, we need to change that.

2. Information: We need to improve the way members access information. Email listservs are currently useful but not sustainable.
 - Have regular member meetings which are webcast, for both smaller and larger groups to distribute information and share ideas.
 - Have a dedicated email, rather like reports@aila.org where people can ask questions and make suggestions, such as suggestions@aila.org
 - We need to improve the website and figure out how to make information more easily available.
 - We need to create communications which are easier to navigate rather than a barrage of emails. Improving the Message Center would be a huge start.
 - Educate members on resources already available. There are plenty of unused resources.
3. Future of Immigration and Electronic Filing: As we are forced to work remotely through necessity, electronic filing has become key to successfully keeping up our practices. As an organization, we need to help those in the rear to catch up because when is the last time you filed a paper DS-260? I would like to help people improve their practices and become more efficient and effective. Regardless of your practice area, modernizing our practices is key.

You might be thinking “she is an insider! It is always the same people!” Just as with any job, you need people with ideas but also with experience. I have been doing this a while and during that time, I have mentored and helped many members become involved, even the softball team. I have dedicated my time to you and want to continue to do so. I did not pursue obtaining formal

endorsements from my peers because I see that the average member already feels as though the board is a clique, and I want members to know that is not the case and AILA is for all. I want people to know they are welcome. Through social events and in person meetings, I strive to make everyone feel welcome and hope they know there is always a place at my table for them.



The reason I became an immigration lawyer was to serve people by helping them with their employment, businesses or uniting with their families and to have a voice. The primary mission of the organization must be the best interest of the immigration lawyers, while at the same time, doing justice for our clients.

I am committed to your success. Vote for Neena Dutta for Secretary!