



Immigration Detention Frequently Asked Questions

What to do if you need help or want to help others

WHAT IS MIDA?

The Midwest Immigrant Defenders Alliance (MIDA) seeks to provide high-quality immigration legal services for free to detained immigrants because there are not government-appointed attorneys in deportation cases. MIDA is a coalition of the National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC), The Resurrection Project (TRP), The Immigration Project (TIP), and the Law Office of the Cook County Public Defender (CCPD).

FOR PEOPLE IN DETENTION

Who qualifies for a free representative in the Chicago Immigration Court?

- You must be in removal proceedings before the Chicago Immigration Court.
- You must currently be held in immigration detention. It does not matter where the detention center is located. Immigrants in the Chicago Immigration Court are commonly detained in Indiana, Wisconsin, and Kentucky.
- Your household income is under 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.
- You have not yet had your first immigration court hearing.
- You do not already have a different immigration legal representative.

Even if you do not meet these criteria or there is not a MIDA representative available at your hearing, you may still be able to obtain free legal help from other programs.

- **For non-detained Chicago residents**, call 312-660-1370 for NIJC or 312-666-3062 for TRP to request a consultation.
- **For detained individuals with cases in the Chicago Immigration Court**, call 773-672-6599 on Tuesdays from 11:00AM to 2:00PM CT to request a consultation with NIJC. Detained immigrants also can call collect at 312-583-9721 or use the pro bono platform and NIJC's 3-digit code, 565.
- **For detained individuals with ties to Cook County, IL, and cases before the Chicago Immigration Court**, call the Cook County Public Defender's Immigration Division at 312-603-0636 or use the pro bono platform and CCPD's code, 1050, on Wednesdays from 9:00AM to 11:00AM.
- **For other regions**, consult the national list of free immigration attorneys: <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/list-pro-bono-legal-service-providers>. Not all courts have good access to free representatives, so it is important to look for one as soon as possible.

- You have the right to hire a private attorney, if you can afford one.
- You have the right to do your case without legal representation, but we do not recommend this because immigration cases are extremely complicated and success rates are much higher for people with representation.

If I qualify, how will I find out if I have a free representative from MIDA?

If you are detained and scheduled for a hearing at the Chicago Immigration Court on a day when MIDA is available, the immigration judge may ask if you want a consultation with a free representative. If you agree, a free representative will arrange a call to speak with you in the detention center within about 2 weeks of the hearing. The judge will delay your case for about 1-3 weeks to allow time to speak with the representative. Waiting can be difficult, but you only get one chance to argue your immigration case and it is very important that you consult an immigration representative before moving forward with your case or waiving your rights. If a MIDA representative is not available on the day of your first immigration court hearing, review the alternative contacts listed above.

In some cases, it is important to not wait for a representative after being detained.

Not everyone is guaranteed a right to an immigration court hearing. The following people should try to contact an immigration attorney as soon as possible if you are in immigration detention because you could be deported without a court hearing:

- People who entered the United States on the visa waiver program.
- People previously ordered deported by an immigration judge.
- People arrested by immigration officials near the border and placed in “expedited removal.”
- People who are not permanent residents and have been convicted of a criminal offense. You should speak with an attorney to determine if your conviction puts you at risk of being deported without a hearing.

If you are afraid to return to your country, it is important to say so repeatedly to every immigration official you meet because you might be eligible for protection in the United States.

How do I know if my immigration representative is good?

Unfortunately, some people may offer to help you with your immigration case but may not be qualified to help, even if they are an attorney. Others may be trying to defraud you for money. Contrary to what many people assume, organizations providing free legal services often provide very high-quality representation. They usually have significant experience with immigration cases in detention and are committed to helping immigrants without concern for money. However, if you hire a private attorney, check to see if they are a member of the American Immigration Lawyers Association (<https://ailalawyer.com>), and confirm that they are not on the list of people

disciplined by the Board of Immigration Appeals (<https://www.justice.gov/eoir/list-of-currently-disciplined-practitioners>).

How do I know when my next court hearing is?

To search for an immigration court hearing, you will need to know your “A number.” This is an 8- or 9-digit identification number that appears on most immigration records and will also be on your detention wristband. You can call 1-800-898-7180 or visit <https://acis.eoir.justice.gov/> to check the status of an immigration case by entering the A number.

How do I get bond to be released from detention?

Depending on different factors including whether you have a criminal record and how you entered the United States, you may not be eligible for bond or the judge may deny bond if they believe that you will run away or are a danger to the community. It is impossible to say exactly how long you will be detained or how much money the judge will require for bond because every case is unique. It is important to talk to a legal representative about whether you are eligible for bond and how to make a strong application for bond.

If the judge agrees to bond, a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident must contact ICE to make arrangements to give them the money. The phone number for the office in Chicago is 312-347-2400 or you can consult a directory for other regions at <https://www.ice.gov/detain/ice-ero-bond-acceptance-facilities>. You can also pay bonds online; for guides on how to do so, visit <https://www.communityjusticeexchange.org/en/resources-all/cebondsguide>.

I have been mistreated at the detention center, what can I do?

If you have a representative, speak with them about the mistreatment. If you do not, you can contact the National Detention & Abuse Reporting Hotline run by the organization Freedom for Immigrants. Call: 9233# (from inside detention). Call: 209-757-3733 (from outside)

I want to leave the United States, so how can I finish my case quickly?

Even if you want to leave, it is important to discuss all of your options, including multiple options for how to leave, with a legal representative. There can be serious consequences to being deported. You might never be able to return to the United States or could unknowingly waive important rights.

FOR FAMILY

What happens when someone is arrested by ICE?

When someone is detained by ICE, they are taken to a processing center and then transferred to a detention center, usually within 24 hours. The detention center might not be in the same state where the arrest occurred.

This flyer contains general information and does not constitute legal advice. For specific legal advice for your case, please consult an attorney or accredited Board of Immigration Appeals representative. (Updated August 2024)

How do I find my family member?

You can search for someone who has been detained using ICE's Online Detainee Locator System: <https://locator.ice.gov>. It is safe to use this website. It may be easier to search using your family member's "A number," an 8- or 9-digit identification number that appears on most immigration records and on the wristbands worn by people in detention.

Is it safe to visit or send money to my family member?

It is common for people who are undocumented to visit family in immigration detention without problems. However, you may wish to speak to an attorney to determine any risks to yourself and you should review the rules for visiting the detention center at <https://www.ice.gov/detention-facilities>.

FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Someone I know got arrested by ICE, how can I help?

- Write a reference letter explaining why they should not be deported. Give specific examples of ways they have helped you, their family, and the community. Give this letter to the person or their legal representative.
- If you were a witness to the arrest, write down everything you saw ICE say and do as soon as possible to help record an accurate account. You can report ICE raids to the ICIRR Hotline at 1-855-435-7693.

I want to support immigrants in detention in general, how can I help?

- Consider donating to the Midwest Bond Fund at <https://www.mibfc.org/> or find other bond funds at <https://www.communityjusticeexchange.org/en/nbfn-directory>. It is much easier for someone to win an immigration case when they are not in detention, but many immigrants struggle to pay expensive bonds.
- Support organizations that defend immigrants such as the [National Immigrant Justice Center](#), [The Immigration Project](#) and [The Resurrection Project](#).
- Contact your federal and local elected officials asking them to support universal representation to provide legal help for everyone in immigration court. Unlike in criminal cases, the government does not guarantee a right to an appointed attorney in immigration cases, even though there are very serious consequences such as detention and deportation.