



The V-News!

VOLUME II | ISSUE 1

THE V-LAW GROUP'S NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2026

WELCOME TO OUR

Quarterly Newsletter

Message from the Managing Attorney



Happy New Year, everyone! Welcome to our quarterly newsletter. With a fresh start to the new year, there is so much we have to share. Since our reopening last year, in March 2025, our practice continues to grow. In December 2025, we resumed accepting bankruptcy (Chapters 7 and 11) and employment law cases, working in conjunction with our long-time affiliate, the Poindexter Law Firm. On that note, I would like to seize this opportunity to thank our old (and new) clients for the referrals. As we always do in every issue, we will catch you up to speed with the latest news and updates on various matters in the legal landscape.

So, specifically, this issue will first address immigration news and updates from September to December 2025. More so, in the last issue, as well as on our social media pages (Facebook and Instagram), we presented our audience with an opportunity to ask us any question about a legal matter or about the law firm. Therefore, this issue will also address some of the questions from our audience in a "Q & A session with the V-Law Group." Then, we shift the focus to our attorney spotlight for this quarter. In the spirit of tax season, our attorney spotlight will be on Beverly Winstead, Esq. She is quite a force to be reckoned with and the V-Law Group is delighted to have worked with her law firm, on behalf of our own client. Last, and certainly not least, and in the spirit of our dedication and commitment to service, we will also shine the spotlight on the D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center and our volunteering role with this program, for our community impact news. I hope you benefit from all what we have to share!

~ Vanessa-Nola Pratt, Esq.

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In the News: Updates in Immigration Law!

The following information is not intended, and may not be construed as legal advice. The objective of this article is to educate, inform, and/or update our audience about current news and events in immigration law. Thus, in light of these updates, please consult with an immigration lawyer.



We concluded the calendar year and the last quarter of 2025 (September - December) with a plethora of substantial updates and developments in immigration law. Some of these updates are well-settled and commonly known, by way of national and international new media headlines from the end of the year.

For example, the world learned about the Trump Administration launching “Operation Metro Surge”, in which it deployed more than 3,000 Department of Homeland Security (“DHS”)/Immigration & Customs Enforcement (“ICE”) agents to the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. Also, the World learned that the Trump Administration added more countries to its travel “ban list” to restrict nationals from these countries from obtaining non-immigrant visas into the United States.

As these are just a few examples of what made national and international headlines, we will skip the details of these updates and shift our focus on other pressing immigration news and updates from September - December 2025, which were not afforded the same degree of awareness and exposure.

While we cannot address every single update, given that there were so many, we shall report on critical and/or major news from this period.

As a matter of fact, September 2025 signified a major turning point in immigration law, as DHS issued a final rule expanding United States Citizenship & Immigration Services’ (“USCIS”) powers, which became effective on October 6, 2025. For the first time since the agency’s creation in 2003, they created a new class of “special agents” and among various duties, granted them the power to:

- Carry firearms
- Exercise use of force, including deadly force, if necessary.
- Undertake pursuits, including vehicular pursuits, to apprehend fleeing suspects.
- Execute warrants for immigration and some non-immigration violations;
- Conduct arrests for felonies committed in their presence;
- Conducting expedited removals.

Also, in September 2025, USCIS announced that it would implement a new version of the Naturalization Civics Test, which, among various changes, increased the number of questions for the exam from 10 questions to 20 questions. These changes were only applicable to Citizenship applicants who filed for Naturalization & Citizenship on or after October 20, 2025.

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Meanwhile, within the scope of ongoing litigation on various controversial immigration policy changes, on September 3, 2025, the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit ("Fifth Circuit"), in *W.M.M v. Donald J. Trump*, No. 25-10534 (5th Cir. 2025), issued a preliminary injunction that blocked the Trump Administration from using the Alien Enemies Act of 1798 to deport Venezuelan nationals.



The significance of this decision is that it is a landmark decision by a three-judge panel, in which the majority (2-1) held that with respect to the definition of "invasion", the activities of a Venezuelan gang, such as, for example, drug trafficking and organized crime, do not constitute an "invasion" or "predatory incursion" by a foreign nation, as defined by the 1798 Act. Accordingly, the Fifth Circuit Court concluded that the Trump Administration improperly invoked the Alien Enemies Act, outside of war and in the absence of a military attack.

Of course, a couple of weeks later, also in September 2025, the Trump Administration filed a petition for an en banc rehearing.

On the subject, this takes us to our immigration news and updates in October 2025. During this very month, the Fifth Circuit granted the Trump Administration's petition for an en banc rehearing and scheduled it for January 2026 (the outcome of this rehearing shall be discussed in the next quarterly issue, so stay tuned!).

Further, in *Noem, Secretary of Homeland Security, et. al. v. National TPS Alliance*, 606 U.S. ____ (2025), the United States Supreme Court, in a 6 - 3 ruling, granted an emergency request from the Trump Administration to end Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for over 300,000 Venezuelans. Specifically, the Court blocked a ruling from the United States District Court for the Northern District of California, which prevented DHS from terminating TPS for Venezuelans. This Supreme Court decision is relevant and important, not just to Venezuelans, but because the Court evaluated the power of one administration to undo the actions of the preceding administration. Thus, in this case, the issue was centered around the Secretary of DHS' authority to vacate the extension of a TPS that had been signed by the previous administration, days before the transition of the new administration occurred.

Additionally, in October 2025, DHS terminated the automatic extension of work permits (employment authorization documents ("EAD")) for immigrants filing renewal applications in certain employment authorization categories. In implementing this new policy, DHS reasoned that the purpose of this change is to prioritize the "proper vetting and screening" of immigrants before granting a new period of authorization and/or a new EAD.

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In November 2025, USCIS restored its practice of conducting neighborhood investigations of potential new citizens. As the basis for this practice, the agency reasoned that its purpose is to verify immigrants' eligibility for naturalization by reviewing their residency, moral character, loyalty to the U.S.

Constitution, and commitment to the Nation's well-being. USCIS further explained that these investigations are vital to maintaining the integrity of the naturalization process, assuring assimilation, and safeguarding the value of American citizenship. Additionally, DHS announced the termination of TPS for Burma ("Myanmar") and Haiti. Specifically, it announced that the end of TPS for Myanmar would take effect on January 26, 2026; whereas the end of TPS for Haiti would take effect on February 3, 2026.

Towards the end of November 2025, and after an Afghan national murdered a National Guard member and severely wounded another in the Nation's Capital, dire consequences translated to exceptionally tougher immigration law policies. In the aftermath of this tragedy, for example, USCIS undertook swift action and issued new guidance that allowed for the consideration of negative country-specific factors in vetting immigrants from 19 designated "high-risk" countries. These 19 "high-risk" countries, comprising a travel ban list, include the following: Afghanistan, Burma (Myanmar), Burundi, Chad, the Republic of Congo, Cuba, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Haiti, Iran, Laos, Libya, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Togo, Turkmenistan, Venezuela, and Yemen.

Additional dire consequences continued into December 2025, as the Trump Administration significantly expanded the travel ban list, by adding more countries to this list.



Additional shifts in operational changes at DHS and USCIS further continued. For example, effective immediately, USCIS suspended and paused the processing of all Forms I-589 (applications for Asylum & Withholding of Removal). Also made effective in December 2025, DHS granted its sub-agency, United States Customs & Border Protection authority to collect facial biometrics from all immigrants, upon U.S. entry and exit at airports, land ports, sea ports, etc.

Towards the end of the month and the year, USCIS announced stricter requirements for Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) applications, noting that the agency saw a 360% increase in VAWA filings since 2020. Among various changes, a self-petitioner must have resided with the abuser during the qualifying relationship; and a self-petitioner must now show proof that he or she entered into a good faith marriage with the abuser.

Although it seems like this last quarter was full of a lot of bad news, we would be remiss to remind you that immigration law is constantly changing. Thus, we implore you to remain positive, steadfast, and encouraged, as litigation challenging numerous immigration policy changes are ongoing and have been in progress since early 2025. On a positive note, we expect to share some good news in the next quarter, so stay tuned!

Q&A Session with the V-Law Group, PLLC



The following questions are what we received from our audience to comprise our Q & A session for this issue. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all who submitted their questions.

Q: “Is there any news from the full ban countries on immigration?”

A: Yes. Since the Trump Administration announced an addition of several countries to its country ban list in December 2025, we now have clarification and additional information. We now know that the ban impacts 75 countries.

Effective January 21, 2026, the Trump Administration paused the issuance of immigrant visas (permanent residency) for Nationals of the following 75 countries:

Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Antigua and Barbuda, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Belize, Bhutan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Burma, Cambodia, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Colombia, Cote d’Ivoire, Cuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dominica, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Fiji, The Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Haiti, Iran, Iraq, Jamaica, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kuwait, Kyrgyz Republic, Laos, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Moldova, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Nepal, Nicaragua, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Republic of the Congo, Russia, Rwanda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Tanzania, Thailand, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, and Yemen.

Those who are impacted are Nationals of the above-mentioned, 75 countries who are: (1) Family members (spouses, children, or parents) of U.S. Nationals who are living abroad; 2. Seeking employment-based visas (workers who are recruited by U.S. employers); and 3. Visa lottery winners. Nonetheless, applicants may still apply for an immigrant visa and even attend interviews at U.S. Embassies.

This ban, however, does not impact non-immigrant visas, such as, for example, a B1/B2 tourist visa applicant or an F1 student visa. As there are many more details that this response cannot possibly cover, this is just a summary of the ban, and updated news since the announcement in December 2025.

Q: “How does this affect DACA recipients?”

A: This ban affects Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) recipients only if they have to depart the United States. For example, DACA recipients who must go through Consular processing, and accordingly, are required to leave the United States to attend an interview for a green card at a United

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States Embassy or consulate is subject to the ban if he or she is a National of one of the above-mentioned 75 countries. Similarly, if a DACA recipient departs the United States on Advanced Parole (i.e. an authorization to leave the United States and re-enter, during a pending adjustment of status application), a DACA recipient who is a National of one of the above-mentioned 75 countries may be impacted and shall risk the ability to re-enter the United States. As a matter of fact, a DACA recipient is highly unlikely to be able to re-enter the United States under this current political climate and tough immigration policies in progress if they are a National of one of these 75 countries.

In summary, any DACA recipient who departs the United States is impacted if he or she is a National of any one of the above-mentioned, 75 countries.

Thus, it follows that if a DACA recipient is eligible for an adjustment of status, either due to marriage or lawful entry into the United States, the DACA recipient would not be affected since he or she is not required to leave the United States for consular processing, and assuming he or she does not leave.

Q: "What about cases in immigration court. Does it mean that cases from the banned countries will head out more faster for deportation?"

A. No, not at all. The ban list has no bearing on immigration court decisions. While the immigration court tends to generally do what they can to fast track cases in removal proceedings, cases from the above-mentioned list of 75 countries would not be expedited any faster than cases from all the other countries.



By appointment only, we are located at:

**1629 K Street, NW, Suite 300
Washington, D.C. 20006**

If you have a question or would like to make an appointment, contact us:

**Tel: (202) 508 -8259
E-mail: info@v-lawgroup.com**

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Q: “One time, several years ago I was encountering a situation at work where someone advised me to ‘keep a paper trail.’ What are the essentials (the do’s and don’ts) of keeping a paper trail?”

A: One of the most important things about keeping a paper trail is being well versed about company policy regarding dos and don’ts. For example, in some industries, such as, for example, the legal and medical industries, privileged and confidential information may pose as a critical concern as it pertains to keeping a paper trail. With that being said, if you are working in an industry that deals with proprietary and/or personal data, in keeping a paper trail, be sure to redact names that are associated with personally identifiable information, such as, for example, social security numbers, bank account numbers, credit card numbers, passport numbers, and/or any sensitive data. Regardless of your status with your employer, you have continuing duty to keep pertinent data confidential. Thus, in handing over your “paper trail” to an attorney or a third party, the proprietary information is redacted and protected, and you have avoided the risk of liability and/or violating company policy.

Additionally, in keeping a paper trail, be sure to keep a chronological timeline or a journal that identifies specific dates, persons, and any other specific information to support your claim. I always advise my clients that details matter! Specificity, in drafting narratives and fact patterns, establish credibility. Thus the more specific your claim is, the more credible you are!

~ Do you have any additional questions for us? We would love to hear from you. Please e-mail your questions to infoev-lawgroup.com.

Q: “If i remain silent will that be a strike against me?”

A: In the context of custodial interrogation (i.e. when someone is in police custody), no. Under these circumstances, remaining silent cannot be a strike against you because this would be a violation of your Fifth Amendment Rights of the U.S. Constitution. The right to remain silent is the touchstone of your Constitutional Right against self-incrimination, as well as your right to be represented by counsel.

In *Salinas v. Texas*, 570 U.S. 178 (2013), however, the United States Supreme Court clarified that you cannot automatically invoke the right to remain silent by simply remaining silent. Rather you must **clearly** invoke this right before you can be afforded the Fifth Amendment’s protection against self-incrimination.

Here is simple mathematics for you to remember: Custody + Interrogation = CLEARLY Expressing Your Right to Remain Silent!

Q: “I was raised to be cooperative and always talk to the police when they approach me, even if I have committed a crime. What is the best way to have a conversation with the police even if I have committed a crime?”

A: The best way to have a conversation with a police officer is to have said conversation with the presence of an attorney. Never speak to a police officer without the presence of an attorney, especially if you have committed a crime.



Attorney Spotlight: Beverly Winstead, Esq.



Beverly Winstead is currently employed as the managing attorney for the Law Office of Beverly Winstead, LLC. She primarily represents individuals and businesses when they have disputes with the IRS and state taxing agencies. Whether a client is being audited, facing a large tax bill, or having a bank account or pay checks levied, she zealously advocates for her clients to get resolution to their tax problems.

In addition to managing her own practice, she serves as Clinic Director and Clinical Law Instructor for the Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic at the University of Maryland, Carey School of Law. The Clinic provides pro bono assistance to low-income taxpayers who have federal and state tax disputes.

She was the first person of color to chair the Maryland State Bar Association (MSBA) Tax section; She has been recognized as “Top 40 under 40 Lawyers” by the National Bar Association for her legal advocacy and Maryland Super Lawyers (2022 thru 2026). She was elected to the American College of Tax Counsel in 2024.

She currently serves as Vice President for the Lewis “Eddie” Winstead Memorial Fund, Inc., a 501(c)(3) organization, established in 2017, to honor the life and legacy of her brother who passed away in 2011. This organization mentors, college bound student-athletes and awards scholarships to students in need of financial assistance. Since 2017, the organization has awarded over \$25,000 in scholarships.

She also serves on the Advisory Board for her family’s farm, Abanitu Organics. “Abanitu” means “From the Heart of God,” is a certified organic farm, in Roxboro, NC. The farm grows various fruits and vegetables, including but not limited to, collard greens, kale, lettuce, blueberries, and grapes.

She attended law school at the University of Maryland and completed her undergraduate studies at Bowie State University. During her tenure at Bowie State, she led the school to 3 Conference basketball championships. In 2014, she was inducted into Bowie’s Basketball Hall of Fame. In 2015 and 2016, the 1997, 1998 and 1999 teams, to which she was a member, were also inducted.

Community Impact Spotlight: The D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center

Did you know that the District of Columbia (“D.C.”) Bar has a program that is dedicated to providing free legal services to individuals, nonprofit organizations, and small businesses? Pertinently, it also affords free legal services to indigent or low-income residents of the District of Columbia. The D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center provides these services through various programs, including and not limited to, the Advice & Referral Clinic, Bankruptcy Clinic, Consumer Law Resource Center, Family Law Assistance Network, Housing Legal Assistance, Immigration Legal Advice & Referral Clinic, and many other programs.

Founded in 1978, the D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center has since become the largest source of pro bono legal assistance in the District of Columbia. It serves more than 20,000 individuals, nonprofits, and small businesses each year. Further, it thrives on the support of donors and more than 1,500 dedicated attorney volunteers, in operating “award-winning legal clinics, projects, and resource centers where and when the community most needs [its] help.” See <https://www.dcbar.org/Pro-Bono/About-the-Center>.



The D.C. Bar Pro Bono Committee (October 2025)

The D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center is governed by the Board of Directors, which consists of elected members of the D.C. Bar Board of Governors (the D.C. Bar Board of Governors is comprised of 20 lawyers who are selected by active members of the D.C. Bar and three members of the public, who are appointed by the Board itself, as non-voting members).

Appointed by the D.C. Bar President, with approval from the Board of Governors, the Pro Bono Committee conducts oversight of the daily activities of the D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center.

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The V-Law Group, PLLC is a proud supporter and frequent volunteer at the D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center. Duly committed to service and a strong belief in access to justice and legal representation for all, we frequently volunteer our time and services at the D.C. Bar Bankruptcy Clinic and at the Advice & Referral Clinic. At our firm, we often encounter prospective clients who are either unemployed or low-income D.C. residents. Thus, as we are often unable to provide them with the requisite legal assistance they need, we typically refer them to the D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center to ensure that they are afforded the requisite access to free legal representation.



If you or someone you know is a D.C. resident, who is indigent or on low-income, needing legal assistance, please contact the D.C. Pro Bono Center, and/or visit the Advice & Referral Clinic, at **901 4th Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20001**, on the following Saturday dates and time this year:

- 10:00AM - Noon**
- on
- January 24, 2026**
- February 7, 2026**
- March 21, 2026**
- April 25, 2026**
- May 30, 2026**
- July 25, 2026**
- September 26, 2026**
- October 24, 2026**
- November 21, 2026**

The Advice & Referral Clinic often hosts its clinic at an alternate location in S.E., D.C. Therefore, please be sure to contact the D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center at **(202) 626-3499 to confirm the location or venue for each upcoming Advice & Referral Clinic.