



# The V-News!

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THE V-LAW GROUP'S NEWSLETTER

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WELCOME TO OUR

## Quarterly Newsletter

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### *Message from the Managing Attorney*



Welcome to our quarterly newsletter. Since our last issue, the firm has grown in more ways than one. On that note, we are pleased to introduce you to our new associate attorney, who joined the firm in July 2025. Therefore, our attorney spotlight for this quarter shall be on our very own, Armand Ketchiozo, Esquire.

Not only have we grown by adding a new member to our team, but our clientele has also grown and we have established a great relationship with our clients, who have expressed a great deal of gratitude and confidence in our work. On the subject, in July, we landed our first win for one of our first cases since our reopening. In that case, the client was initially denied a request for an extension to remain in the USA.

After the client hired us to appeal this case, United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) granted the appeal/request for the client's extension to stay in the USA. Cases like these give us the motivation, drive, and determination to keep pushing in the best interests of our clients. True to our motto, "we are not just a law firm, we are a support system!" With that being said, this issue will continue to provide you with our usual legal updates and community impact news. In addition to our usual updates in immigration law, in this quarter, we feature a discussion of case law precedent from the United States Supreme Court. So, we hope that you find all that we have to share useful.

Meanwhile, if you have **any** questions for us, please send us an e-mail at [info@v-lawgroup.com](mailto:info@v-lawgroup.com), and we will feature your question in our next issue. Until next time!

~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.*

As we move through the second half of 2025, several key developments in U.S. immigration law and policy have occurred between May and August that may affect immigrants, visa holders, employers, and U.S. citizens alike.



During the period from May to August 2025, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) increased "at-large" arrests. The increase was driven by a shift in enforcement strategy by the Trump administration, with a greater focus on community arrests of individuals with minor or no criminal convictions.

In May 2025, the U.S. Supreme Court lifted a lower court's order that had temporarily blocked parts of the government's plan to end the parole programs for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans (CHNV). This means the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) can now move forward with terminating parole granted under these programs and revoking work permits that were based on CHNV parole.

In June 2025, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced the termination of

Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Cameroon and Nepal. These designations officially ended in August 2025, and nationals of both countries were advised to depart the United States voluntarily once their status expired in order to remain in compliance with immigration laws. Also in June, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) updated guidance in Volume 4 of the USCIS Policy Manual concerning the validity of marriages between a principal asylee or refugee and their claimed derivative spouse. Under the revised policy, such marriages must be legally valid in the jurisdiction where the marriage was celebrated to be recognized for immigration benefit purposes.

In July 2025, USCIS began collecting new fees for certain immigration benefit requests. A portion of the revenue from these fees is deposited into the Immigration Examinations Fee Account (IEFA), which helps fund USCIS operations. The remaining revenue is transferred to the U.S. Treasury's general fund. The Federal Register Notice (FRN) outlines when the new fees take effect, how they must be paid, whether a fee waiver may be available, and the consequences of nonpayment. Additionally, DHS is required to adjust these fees annually to account for inflation.

In August 2025, USCIS reinstated enhanced screening and vetting procedures to better

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detect individuals attempting to defraud or abuse the immigration system, including those making false claims to U.S. citizenship. At the same time, USCIS launched efforts to raise public awareness about the risks and consequences of immigration fraud. Individuals who submit false information or engage in deceptive practices to gain immigration benefits may face serious penalties, including denial of benefits and potential legal action.

Immigration policy in the U.S. continues to evolve, shaped by domestic politics, global events, and court rulings. The period from May to August 2025 saw substantial updates aimed at streamlining legal immigration pathways, particularly for families, while also responding to humanitarian needs.

*~ Armand Ketchiozo, Esq.*

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](mailto:info@v-lawgroup.com)

# *From a Legal Perspective: Case Spotlight From the United States Supreme Court*

This quarter, our feature case is *Gutierrez v. Saenz*, No. 23-7809, 606 U.S. \_\_\_, 2025, from the United States Supreme Court.



In *Gutierrez, Supra*, Ruben Gutierrez was convicted of capital murder, in 1998. He was sentenced to death for his involvement in a robbery and killing Escolastica Harrison.

In seeking DNA testing evidence from the crime scene to prove his innocence, per Texas Code of Criminal Procedure, Article 64, Gutierrez sought multiple appeals and *habeas corpus* petitions.

Pertinently, in 2019, Gutierrez filed a law suit in federal court, under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, against District Attorney, Luis Saenz, et al., asserting that Texas' post-conviction DNA testing procedures violated his liberty interests in utilizing state post-conviction procedures.

The district court, in agreeing with Gutierrez, granted declaratory relief and found that it was fundamentally unfair that Texas gives

prisoners the right to challenge their death sentence through habeas petitions, but prevents them from obtaining DNA testing to support their petitions, unless they can establish innocence in the underlying crime.

On appeal, the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit ("Fifth Circuit") held that Gutierrez had no standing to bring a § 1983 claim. The Fifth Circuit found, and reasoned that Gutierrez's claimed injury was not redressable because a declaratory judgment would be unlikely to cause the prosecutor to "reverse course and allow testing." Therefore, the Fifth Circuit vacated the District Court's judgement. Therefore, the Petitioner filed a petition with the United States Supreme Court ("Court"), the Court granted certiorari, and it held oral arguments in February 2025.

Here, the Court considered the issue of whether a Texas death-row inmate has standing to sue the state for its refusal to grant access to DNA testing, under a law that provides for said testing, but only when an inmate can prove that exculpatory results would have pre-empted a conviction.

Justice Sotomayor delivered the Opinion of the Court. As part of the 6-3 majority, Chief Justices Roberts, Justice Kagan, Justice Kavanaugh, and Justice Jackson joined in this Opinion, with Justice Barrett joining in all but one part of the Opinion (with Justice Barrett filing an opinion, concurring in part,

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and concurring in the judgement); Justice Thomas filed a dissenting opinion; and Justice Alito also filed a dissenting opinion, in which Justice Thomas and Justice Gorsuch joined.

In rendering its decision, the Court, of course, evaluated and addressed a series of case law precedent. Specifically, for example, the Court drew a comparison to case law precedent in *Skinner v. Switzer*, 562 U.S. 521 (2011).

In doing so, the Court explained that it held, in *Skinner*, that a Texas prisoner could file a due process claim, under § 1983, against a prosecutor, where the prisoner alleged that the prosecutor's refusal to turn over evidence deprived him of his liberty interests in utilizing state procedures to obtain reversal of his conviction or to obtain a pardon or reduction of his sentence. The Court further explained that in that decision, it reasoned that while the prisoner could not challenge, in federal court, the state court decisions that denied his Article 64 motions, he could assert in a federal § 1983 action, that Article 64 unconstitutionally prevented him from obtaining DNA testing.

The Court further noted that the first time it addressed the question of a state prisoner's standing to bring a due process claim against the custodian of his evidence was in *Reed v. Goertz*, 598 U.S. 230, in which this Court confronted another challenge to Texas' post-conviction DNA testing law. The Court explained that in *Reed*, it held that the prisoner had standing to pursue declaratory relief.

In acknowledging that *Reed* is indistinguishable from this case, the Court noted that Gutierrez alleges that the local

prosecutor's denial of his DNA testing request deprived him of his liberty interests; and that the declaratory judgment Gutierrez seeks would redress the injury by changing the legal status of the parties and eliminating the state prosecutor's allegedly unlawful justification for denying DNA testing.

Turning to the Fifth Circuit's decision, the Court noted that the Fifth Circuit recognized the "clear parallels" between this case and *Reed*, but that the Fifth Circuit distinguished *Reed* from this case on the basis that "the local prosecutor in this case was unlikely to allow testing even if a federal court declared that Texas may not deny DNA testing that would affect only the punishment stage."

Respondents argued that Gutierrez lacks standing because the District Court's reason for declaring part of Article 64 unconstitutional was only one of several independent state-law grounds, supporting the prosecutor's decision to deny access to the evidence. The Court, however, rejected this argument.

In doing so, the Court stated that Respondents' argument fails in an attempt to establish a distinction between this case and *Reed*. It explained that the proper focus of the standing inquiry is the complaint, and that Gutierrez's complaint challenges not just Article 64's limitation to actual innocence claims, but also the other barriers Article 64 establishes between Gutierrez and DNA testing. Further, the Court also reasoned that "more fundamentally, the Fifth Circuit erred in transforming the redressability inquiry into a guess about whether a favorable court

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decision will ultimately result in the prosecutor turning over the DNA evidence.”

Further, the Court explained that a declaratory judgment in Gutierrez’s favor would redress his injury by removing the “allegedly unconstitutional barrier Article 64 erected between Gutierrez and the requested testing.”

Noting that in *Reed*, the Court rejected the prosecutor’s assertion that a declaratory judgment would not change his ultimate decision to turn over the evidence, it reasoned that the idea that “a prosecutor might eventually find another reason to deny a prisoner’s DNA testing request does not eliminate the prisoner’s standing to argue that the cited reasons violated his rights under the Due Process Clause [of the United States Constitution.]”

Finally, the Court rejected the Respondents’ argument that Gutierrez’s case is now moot because the state prosecutor refused to grant Gutierrez’s request for DNA testing, even after the District Court issued the declaratory judgment. The Court explained that a procedural due process claim, such as Gutierrez’s, is not mooted by “the defendant’s mid-level appeal promise that, regardless of the lawsuit’s outcome, the ultimate result will remain the same.” The Court cautioned that to hold otherwise would allow defendants in similar suits to “manufacture mootness” by ensuring that no what procedure a court requires them to apply, the same substantive outcome would follow, whereas Article III does not require this result.



In summary, the United States Supreme Court, in a June 2025 decision, held that Gutierrez has standing to bring his § 1983 claim, challenging Texas’ post-conviction DNA testing procedures, under the Due Process Clause of the Constitution. Therefore, it reversed and remanded the Fifth Circuit Court’s decision.

## ***Attorney Spotlight: Meet Armand Ketchiozo, Esq., The V-Law Group, PLLC***

In July 2025, the V-Law Group, PLLC, welcomed a new associate attorney, Armand Ketchiozo, Esq., to our team. Since joining the V-Law Group, Attorney Ketchiozo has served as a invaluable asset in handling the firm's immigration matters. Accordingly, it is particularly fitting that we feature him in our attorney spotlight for this quarter.



### ***What are your thoughts about being an immigration lawyer and practicing immigration law? What drives you?***

*As an attorney, I'm driven by a deep commitment to justice, fairness, and the defense of the vulnerable. I believe the law is most powerful when it serves as a shield – not just for the privileged, but for the poor, the voiceless, and the overlooked. That's why I've chosen to focus my legal practice on immigration law.*

Immigration law sits at the intersection of human dignity and legal structure. It's a highly regulated field – one I appreciate because rules, when applied fairly, create order and protect against chaos and abuse. But I also see how complex and inaccessible this system can be, especially for those who are unfamiliar with their rights or simply can't afford legal help.

Many immigrants face overwhelming challenges – not just legal, but emotional, cultural, and economic. They often navigate life-changing decisions with little support or understanding of the protections they're entitled to under the law. I believe all people, regardless of where they come from or what they can afford, deserve access to justice. That belief guides every case I take.

### ***In your capacity as an immigration attorney, what is your mission?***

My mission is to provide clear, honest, and compassionate legal guidance, especially to those who might otherwise be left behind. Because at the end of the day, the law should be a tool for justice – not a barrier to it."

*For additional information about Attorney Ketchiozo, please visit his profile on our website:  
<https://thev-lawgroup.com/armand-ketchiozo-esq/>*

## *Community Impact Spotlight: Grace Helping Hands*

Grace Helping Hands was born from a simple, yet profound realization: access to basic hygiene products is not a luxury—it's a necessity. Yet, for many women and children experiencing homelessness, these essential items are often out of reach.

Our founder, Manuella King, had been volunteering since 2008 with local nonprofits like SOME (So Others Might Eat), Bread for the City, and her church. Over the years, she worked directly with vulnerable populations and consistently noticed a quiet but urgent need—feminine hygiene and personal care items were often scarce, if not completely unavailable. Women would ask discreetly for pads or wipes. Mothers would request toiletries for their daughters. It was a recurring pattern that left a lasting impression.

In 2022, after assembling kits as part of a church outreach event, Manuella felt a tug on her spirit. She saw how something as small as a thoughtfully packed hygiene kit could restore dignity, offer relief, and communicate care. That moment sparked the beginning of what would become Grace Helping Hands.

By December 2024, Grace Helping Hands officially launched as a grassroots initiative. Within the first month, the organization had already distributed over 370 kits. Each one was hand-assembled with care and delivered through trusted partners like shelters, outreach teams, and food pantries in Montgomery County, Howard County, Prince George's County, Baltimore City and Washington DC.



Our name—Grace Helping Hands—is intentional. "Grace" reflects our belief that everyone deserves compassion and dignity, no matter their circumstances. "Helping Hands" honors the many volunteers, donors, and community partners who make this work possible.

What began at a kitchen table is now a growing community effort. We partner with organizations like Shepherd's Table, City of Refuge Baltimore, Helping Up Mission, and more to ensure these kits reach those who need them most.

~Manuella King

Founder & Director, Grace Helping Hands

If you would like to support the mission of Grace Helping Hands, you may do so by making a donation. Please scan this QR Code:

