

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 2, 2026

The Honorable Todd Blanche
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20530

Sirce E. Owen
Acting Director
Executive Office for Immigration Review
5107 Leesburg Pike
Falls Church, VA 22041

Dear Attorney General Blanche and Director Owen:

We write to express our support for the Department of Justice's (DOJ) Recognition and Accreditation (R&A) Program housed within the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR), to relay our deep concerns about the current operational capacity of the program, and to request that you undo recent staffing cuts to restore its full functionality. As more individuals go through the immigration process without legal representation and as more nonprofits seek to step up and support their community by applying for accreditation, it is imperative that the R&A Program is properly staffed and is able to process new applications allowing more authorized non-attorneys and nonprofit organizations to provide quality legal assistance to our nation's most vulnerable immigrants.

The R&A Program allows non-attorney individuals who work or volunteer at nonprofit organizations to provide legal support to immigrants who otherwise would not have access to legal representation. According to the DOJ website, the R&A program, "aims to increase the availability of competent immigration legal representation for low-income and indigent persons, thereby promoting the effective and efficient administration of justice."¹ Unfortunately the DOJ's own actions have undercut the stated intent of this program, with CBS News reporting earlier this year that the DOJ reassigned lawyers who were responsible for renewing and approving applications, leaving the program with only two employees, neither of whom has authority to approve or deny new applications.² These staffing changes have been devastating to communities across the country, as more immigrants go without representation or counsel in immigration proceedings.

Such staffing cuts are particularly harmful because R&A capacity is more critical today than ever before. By training and accrediting individuals who are not attorneys, the R&A program

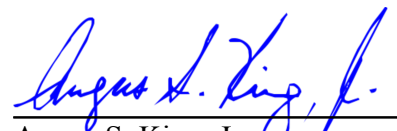
¹ <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/recognition-and-accreditation-program>

² <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/justice-dept-recognition-accreditation-office-helping-indigent-immigrants-stalls/>

helps reduce swelling court backlogs and allows immigrants to gain access to quality legal assistance for their asylum, visa, or work permit applications. Accredited nonprofits and individuals are also able to provide legal representation for the ever increasing number of immigrants who overwhelm court dockets as self-represented individuals, with recent figures indicating that 52% of people facing deportation in immigration courts lack access to legal counsel.³ This is especially concerning as recent studies indicate that roughly 70% of detainees held in ICE detention facilities have no criminal conviction.⁴ Additionally, the R&A program helps immigrants distinguish between legitimate, quality legal counsel from untrained or fraudulent individuals who give faulty or incorrect legal advice to immigrants, often while charging exorbitant fees, more commonly known as notario fraud.

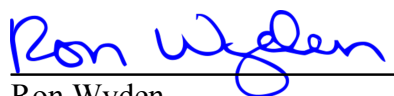
When immigrants lack access to adequate representation, the ripple effects are felt throughout our community. Many of these individuals work in the healthcare, education, tourism, or construction industries, where a gap in employment authorization or legal status can have a significant impact on both families and the local economy. Due to the importance of the DOJ's R&A program in addressing the gap in legal representation, we urge you to undo the Department's harmful staffing cuts and reassignments and either reinstate or train the necessary staff to restore the program's ability to process both new and renewal applications for individuals and nonprofit organizations in a timely manner.

Sincerely,


Jacky Rosen
United States Senator
Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator
Peter Welch
United States Senator
Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator

³ <https://www.vera.org/ending-mass-incarceration/reducing-incarceration/detention-of-immigrants/advancing-universal-representation-initiative/immigration-court-legal-representation-dashboard>

⁴ <https://tracreports.org/immigration/quickfacts/>

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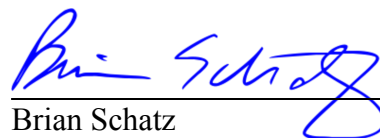
Ron Wyden
United States Senator

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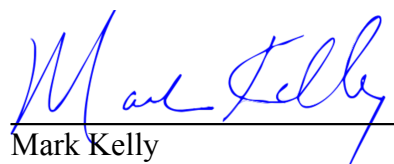
Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Chris Van Hollen", written over a horizontal line.

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Brian Schatz", written over a horizontal line.

Brian Schatz
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Mark Kelly", written over a horizontal line.

Mark Kelly
United States Senator