

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 18, 2026

The Honorable Todd Blanche
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Attorney General Todd Blanche:

We, members of the Illinois congressional delegation, write to you regarding disturbing reports of so-called “mega master” immigration hearings at the Chicago Immigration Court, as well as other immigration courts across the country. Through these hearings, the Department of Justice’s (DOJ) Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) is intentionally overcrowding dockets with little notice to immigrants in an effort to manufacture significant numbers of removal orders and advance the Administration’s mass deportation campaign.¹ Reports suggest that DOJ is calling as many as 185 noncitizens to court on a single docket,² an action designed to drive mass deportations through chaos and confusion.³

In May 2026, EOIR instituted a new policy in non-detained immigration courts, requiring judges to conduct master calendar hearings for 100 individuals twice per week, while also maintaining their previously-scheduled dockets and individual merits hearings.⁴ In many cases, these individuals have never been inside a courtroom, are unrepresented, do not speak English or Spanish fluently, do not understand the requirements of immigration proceedings, and are seeking asylum.⁵ Nonetheless, they are expected to inform the court of the forms of relief they seek and enter pleadings that could severely restrict the rest of their case.⁶

Scheduling tactics deliberately make hearings difficult to attend. In many cases, the new “mega master” hearing dates are scheduled on an accelerated timeline and sometimes take place before the noncitizen even receives the updated hearing notice in the mail.⁷ In Chicago, the median notice time given to immigrants to appear at court was 34 days in June 2026, compared to 229 days in May 2026.⁸ Individuals who receive

¹ Ximena Bustillo, *Immigration Courts Are Using a New Tactic to Speed Up Deportations*, NPR (May 26, 2026), <https://www.npr.org/2026/05/26/nx-s1-5830474/trump-immigration-courts-mega-masters>.

² Adriana Cardona-Maguigad & Lauren FitzPatrick, *Chaotic, Crowded Chicago Immigration Mega Court Hearing Are Fueling Record Deportation Orders*, CHI. SUN-TIMES (Jul. 24, 2026), <https://chicago.suntimes.com/immigration/2026/07/24/chaotic-crowded-chicago-immigration-mega-court-hearings-are-fueling-record-deportation-orders>.

³ *Id.*

⁴ As reported to Senate Judiciary Committee Ranking Member Durbin by the National Immigration Judges Union on Aug. 5, 2026; see also Armando Garcia, *Immigration Attorneys Say Some Courts are Holding Over 100 Case Hearings Daily*, ABC NEWS (May 29, 2026), <https://abcnews.com/US/immigration-attorneys-courts-holding-100-case-hearings-daily/story?id=133397142>.

⁵ See Kate Morrissey, *The ‘Mega Masters’ Tactic: Mass Immigration Hearings Inside Crowded Courtrooms*, CAPITAL & MAIN (Jul. 14, 2026), <https://capitalandmain.com/the-mega-masters-tactic-mass-immigration-hearings-inside-crowded-courtrooms/>; Nat’l Immigration Project, “Mega Master” Hearings: Fact Cases & Bad Outcomes (June 9, 2026), <https://ninpnl.org/sites/default/files/2026-06/Mega-Master-Hearings-Explainer.pdf>; Adriana Cardona-Maguigad & Lauren FitzPatrick; Adriana Cardona-Maguigad & Lauren FitzPatrick, *supra* note 2.

⁶ See Kate Morrissey, *The ‘Mega Masters’ Tactic: Mass Immigration Hearings Inside Crowded Courtrooms*, CAPITAL & MAIN (Jul. 14, 2026), <https://capitalandmain.com/the-mega-masters-tactic-mass-immigration-hearings-inside-crowded-courtrooms/>; Press Release, Nat’l Immigrant Justice Center, *Trump Administration Short Circuits Due Process with New Mass Hearings for Unrepresented Immigrants*, Nat’l Immigrant Justice Center (May 29, 2026), <https://immigrantjustice.org/press-release/trump-administration-short-circuits-due-process-with-new-mass-hearings-for-unrepresented-immigrants/>.

⁷ Kate Morrissey, *The ‘Mega Masters’ Tactic: Mass Immigration Hearings Inside Crowded Courtrooms*, CAPITAL & MAIN (Jul. 14, 2026), <https://capitalandmain.com/the-mega-masters-tactic-mass-immigration-hearings-inside-crowded-courtrooms/>.

⁸ Adriana Cardona-Maguigad & Lauren FitzPatrick, *supra* note 2.

inadequate notice are more likely to be removed at the expense of due process.⁹ This adds to the chaos already manufactured by this Administration as it carries out mass arrests within courthouses, frightening thousands of noncitizens from appearing for court.¹⁰

Courtrooms handling upwards of 150 respondents in a judge's morning docket raise serious concerns about whether individuals are receiving a meaningful opportunity to be heard.¹¹ Dozens of unrepresented respondents appear in a single hearing, in courtrooms designed to accommodate approximately 25 individuals.¹² This limits meaningful opportunities for them to understand their rights, seek legal representation, or even obtain adequate translations while in the hearing.¹³ These concerns are compounded by recent efforts to gut asylum protections. United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has eliminated certain initial asylum interviews, causing more asylum seekers to appear directly before an immigration judge,¹⁴ and the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) issued a decision last year allowing immigration judges to summarily deny claims without a full evidentiary hearing on the merits.¹⁵

It is also alarming to see mega master hearings involving children, particularly unaccompanied children, many of whom have often already been subjected to trauma, abuse, and exploitation and now have limited access to legal counsel.¹⁶ For unaccompanied children in particular, these types of proceedings make it harder to understand what is happening, ask questions, identify errors, or communicate with attorneys, advocates, or caregivers.¹⁷

Mega master hearings are the latest effort to weaponize the immigration courts to facilitate mass removals. The Administration is already placing extraordinary pressure on immigration judges to expedite the adjudication of cases without careful review.¹⁸ Over 100 immigration judges with years of experience have been

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ Ximena Bustillo, *ICE'S Novel Strategy Allows for More Arrests from Inside Immigration Courts*, NPR (Jun. 12, 2025), <https://www.npr.org/2025/06/12/nx-s1-5409403/trump-immigration-courts-arrests>; Hamed Aleaziz, Luis Ferré-Sadurní & Miriam Jordan, *How ICE Is Seeking to Ramp Up Deportations Through Courthouse Arrests*, N.Y. TIMES (Jun. 1, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/30/us/politics/ice-courthouse-arrests.html>; E. Tammy Kim, *Inside Donald Trump's Attack on Immigration Courts*, THE NEW YORKER (Oct. 23, 2025), <https://www.newyorker.com/inside-donald-trumps-attack-on-immigration-court>.

¹¹ Adriana Cardona-Maguigad & Lauren FitzPatrick, *supra* note 2.

¹² *Id.*; Armando Garcia, *Immigration Attorneys Say Some Courts are Holding Over 100 Case Hearings Daily*, ABC NEWS (May 29, 2026), <https://abcnews.com/US/immigration-attorneys-courts-holding-100-case-hearings-daily/story?id=133397142>

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ Rebecca Beitsch, *New Rule Could Speed Deportation of Asylum Seekers*, THE HILL (Jul. 28, 2026), <https://thehill.com/policy/national-security/5994742-trump-administration-cuts-asylum-interviews/>.

¹⁵ *Matter of H-A-A-V-*, 29 I&N Dec. 233 (BIA 2025), <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/media/1413846/dl?inline>.

¹⁶ Gwynne Hogan, *Inside the New York Court Where Children Face Deportation Without Access to Attorneys*, THE GUARDIAN (Jul. 31, 2026), <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2026/jul/31/unaccompanied-children-manhattan-immigration-court>; Libby Denkmann & Sarah Leibovitz, *Hundreds of Children are Headed to 'Mega' Immigration Hearings This Week*, NPR (Jul. 8, 2026), <https://www.kuow.org/soundside/2026-07-24/hundreds-of-children-are-headed-to-mega-immigration-hearings-this-week>; Carolyn Stein, *Durbin, Foster Decry Legal Services Funding Halt For Immigrant Children*, CHICAGO TRIBUNE (Jul. 31, 2026), <https://www.chicagotribune.com/2026/07/31/durbin-foster-funding-legal-services-immigrant-children/>; Press Release, Acacia Center for Justice, *The Acacia Center for Justice Condemns Move to Fast-Track Children through the Courts in 'Megs Master' Hearings*, (June 12, 2026), <https://acaciajustice.org/acacia-condemns-master-calendar/>.

¹⁷ American Bar Association, *Understanding Recent EOIR Trends in Unaccompanied Children's Cases: Rocket Dockets, Advanced Hearings & Mega Masters*, American Bar Association (July 14, 2026), <https://cilacademy.org/2026/07/14/understanding-recent-eoir-trends-in-unaccompanied-childrens-cases-rocket-dockets-advanced-hearings-mega-masters/>.

¹⁸ Laila Khan & Christ Opila, *ICE Attorneys Increasingly Request Case Dismissals at Immigration Courts Hearings-and Immigration Judges Grant Them on the Spot*, AM. IMMIGR. COUNCIL (Oct. 7, 2025), <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/blog/ice-attorneys-case-dismissals-immigration-court-hearings-judges-grant/>; Valerie Gonzalez & Cybele Mayes-Osterman, *Breakneck Pace in Immigration Courts is Driving Up Deportation Orders*, AP NEWS (Aug. 1, 2026), <https://apnews.com/article/trump-immigration->

fired.¹⁹ In September 2025, EOIR issued a directive requiring judges to complete 95 percent of non-detained cases in one year.²⁰

The National Association of Immigration Judges has voiced concerns that EOIR's policy for mass hearings not only creates serious operational and logistical challenges, but also unnecessary security concerns.²¹ In a recent letter to Senate Judiciary Committee leadership, they emphasized that these mega master hearings will not solve the existing case-management problems, stating, "[i]nstead, [these hearings] create[] new operational failures and avoidable security hazards while placing impossible demands on already overburdened courts."²²

Illinois has repeatedly felt the disastrous impact of the Administration's mass deportation agenda. From Operation Midway Blitz and the attempted deployment of the National Guard in Chicago to repeated attempts to withhold federal funding based solely on policy disagreements, the Trump Administration's mass deportation campaign has involved activities that, at a minimum, raise serious constitutional concerns and, at worse, are an all-out attack on the constitutional rights of Illinoisians.²³ Illinois was the first state to investigate the misconduct of federal law enforcement throughout these operations.²⁴ These so-called mega master hearings appear to be the latest example of policies prioritizing enforcement and deportation quotas over due process, while creating unnecessary fear, confusion, and uncertainty for the communities we represent. Immigration proceedings must prioritize fairness and the rule of law, rather than numerical enforcement targets.²⁵

Accordingly, we request responses to the following questions no later than September 1, 2026:

1. In light of policy changes regarding preliminary asylum interviews, what procedures is DOJ using to ensure that each asylum applicant receives a full and fair evaluation of the merits of their claim?
2. What factors account for the significant reduction in hearing notice periods between May and June 2026 in immigration courts?

[deportation-asylum-judges-82d6b7e79f4fd12856ff1c5ad66f2445](#).

¹⁹ Ali Rogin & Ali Schmitz, *Immigration Judge Says Trump Administration's Firings and Policies are 'Disheartening'*, PBS NEWS (Jul. 8, 2026), <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/immigration-judge-says-trump-administrations-firings-and-policies-are-disheartening>.

²⁰ Memorandum from Sirce E. Owen, Acting Dir. Exec. Off. Immigration Review, on Case Priorities and Immigration Court Performance Measures, PM 25-47 (Sept. 12, 2025), <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/media/1413981/dl?inline>; Am. Immigration Lawyers Ass'n, *Policy Brief: America Needs Independent, Fair, and Efficient Immigration Courts*, AILA Doc. No 26031900 (Mar. 19, 2026), <https://www.aila.org/library/policy-brief-america-needs-independent-fair-and-efficient-immigration-courts>.

²¹ Letter from Holly D'Andrea, *President - National Association of Immigration Judges* (Aug. 5, 2026).

²² *Id.*

²³ See Matt Masterson, *Feds Reject CTA's Revised Safety Plan, Threaten to Withhold Millions in Transit Funding*, WTTW NEWS (Dec. 19, 2025), <https://news.wttw.com/2025/12/19/feds-reject-cta-s-revised-safety-plan-threaten-withhold-millions-transit-funding>; Sara Tenenbaum, *Illinois Lawsuit Over Trump's Deployment of National Guard to Chicago Dismissed, Orders are No Longer Operational*, CBS NEWS (April 20, 2026), <https://www.cbsnews.com/chicago/news/illinois-lawsuit-trump-national-guard-chicago-dismissed/>; Associated Press, *ICE Arrests Nearly 550 in Chicago Area as Part of 'Midway Blitz,' Officials Say*, WTTW (Sept. 19, 2025), <https://news.wttw.com/2025/09/19/more-400-arrests-made-chicago-area-operation-so-far-top-immigration-official-says>; Mark Rivera, et al., *Thousands Arrested, Deported By Immigration Agents During Operation Midway Blitz, New Records Reveal*, ABC 7 (Apr. 1, 2026), <https://abc7chicago.com/post/immigration-enforcement-thousands-arrested-deported-ice-agents-border-patrol-operation-midway-blitz-new-records-reveal/18824584/>; Brett Samuels, *Trump Suggests Using 'Dangerous' US Cities as 'Training Grounds' For Military*, THE HILL (Sept. 30, 2025), <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/5528730-trump-military-training-cities-crime-crackdown/>.

²⁴ Ill. Accountability Comm'n, *Final Report of the Illinois Accountability Commission* (2026), <https://ilac.illinois.gov/2026-04-iac-final-report.html>.

²⁵ Caroline Kubzansky & Joe Mahr, *supra* note 2.

3. What steps are being taken to ensure respondents in immigration court receive adequate notice of their proceedings?
4. What is the appropriate process for a respondent in immigration court to request additional time to obtain an attorney?
5. What measures is DOJ taking to ensure that unrepresented respondents are afforded adequate due process, including having sufficient notice to appear before an immigration court?
6. How is the DOJ ensuring that the current immigration court system has adequate personnel, meets courtroom capacity needs, and provides staff with the proper administrative resources to manage these increased caseloads and to ensure due process for every noncitizen respondent?
7. In response to a question for the record from Senator Padilla after your Senate Judiciary Committee nomination hearing, you stated that all master calendar hearings are conducted “fully in accordance with the applicable law....”²⁶ Please specify what applicable laws were referred to in this response.
8. In your response to Senator Padilla, you also stated that when individuals appearing at mega master hearings have “specific questions or concerns, immigration judges will hear those cases individually as appropriate.”²⁷ What are the protocols or policies in place to ensure respondents appearing at mega master hearings be heard? How should a respondent request that a case be heard “individually”?

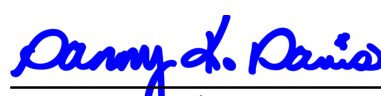
We urge the Administration to discontinue practices that undermine due process, including the use of mega master hearings. Instead, the Administration should ensure that asylum seekers receive fair and meaningful hearings and uphold the integrity of our nation's immigration system. We appreciate your prompt attention to this matter and look forward to your response.

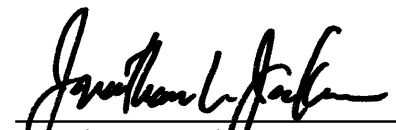
Sincerely,

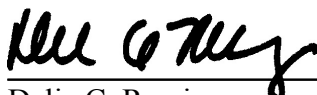

 Raja Krishnamoorthi
 Member of Congress

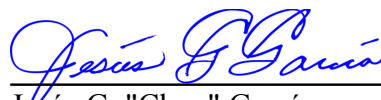

 Richard J. Durbin
 United States Senator

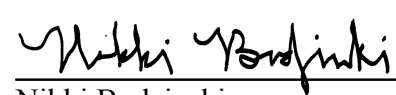

 Tammy Duckworth
 United States Senator


 Danny K. Davis
 Member of Congress


 Jonathan L. Jackson
 Member of Congress

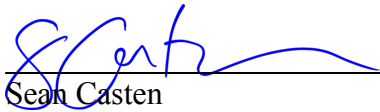

 Delia C. Ramirez
 Member of Congress


 Jesús G. "Chuy" García
 Member of Congress


 Nikki Budzinski
 Member of Congress

²⁶ Response to Question for the Record submitted by Senator Padilla, Nomination of Todd Blanche to be Attorney General of the United States, Senate Committee on the Judiciary, 119th Cong. (2026) (response dated July 17, 2026).

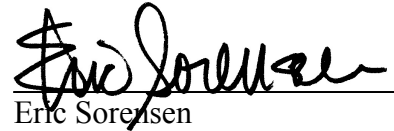
²⁷ *Id.*



Sean Casten
Member of Congress



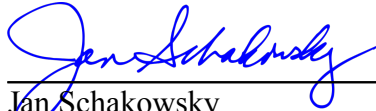
Mike Quigley
Member of Congress



Eric Sorensen
Member of Congress



Bill Foster
Member of Congress



Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



Bradley Scott Schneider
Member of Congress



Robin L. Kelly
Member of Congress