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Campaign Statement **2014/2015 Board of Governors**



My Priorities if Elected to the Board of Governors:

- **Gaining Respect for You as An AILA Member By Promoting AILA's Relevance and Expert Status**

AILA struggles with remaining relevant to the debate. AILA attorneys must be seen as the immigration law experts by Congress, the media, and government agencies we work with to impact effective change, fulfill our goals as an organization, and positively affect our members' case outcomes. This is two-fold challenge – remaining the go-to choice for comment and advice to the outside world we are trying to impact while staying relevant to our own members, the inside of our organization. We lose our membership if they believe that agencies do not listen to us and Congress is not impacted by our publications and presence to dissuade harmful laws from being passed.

Part of this is a marketing problem. Part of this is a public perception problem. The comparison of immigration attorneys to predatory loan attorneys and scam artists who want to take people's money and are looking out for themselves, not their clients, shows how far we still need to go in having the general public trust us, let alone Congress and media to reach out to us first before damage is done. This negative perception of immigration attorneys is inescapably linked to the ongoing Unlawful Practice of Law (UPL) problem we face. Many new members struggle with UPL competition, having never been in the field prior and considering notarios regularly come out of the woodwork in droves with any talk of reform. Members want to know – what is AILA doing about this? We need to take a fresh look and try alternative means of establishing that credibility systematically and frequently among the general public, our legislators, and the media so we can be more effective for our clients and our membership.

- **Promoting AILA's Effectiveness By Keeping Government Agencies Accountable for Inconsistent Decisions & Encouraging Effective AILA Case Liaison Assistance**

One of the most frustrating parts of our practice is the seemingly arbitrary RFEs, NOIDs, and denials that vary depending on where a case is filed and which officer reviews it. Yet, the agency heads contend that their goal is a uniform application of the law, something we just don't see in practice.

In my practice, I regularly file inadmissibility waivers and understand the frustration that many AILA members experience with the seemingly arbitrary, irrational, and cursory review CIS makes of I-601A waivers as opposed to I-601s, which are supposed to have the same standard of review. As a member of the AILA National Benefit Center (NBC) committee for the past two years, we have been dealing with CIS's changing policy applications and treatment of I-601As. We fought for RFE issuance instead of outright denials, but then practice transitioned to boilerplate RFEs if an RFE was issued at all, to arbitrary denials with no confirmation of what documentation was insufficient, and an overall widening standard of extreme hardship between I-601As and traditional I-601s with no logical explanations given. By pressing the agency, holding them to the intent behind the policy, our committee has been able to turn the tide

against flat out denials without RFEs, a dramatic drop off in Reason to Believe Denials on I-601As, and our members now have a fighting chance to challenge and further document cases that don't sail through. But the fight is far from over and compromises, diplomacy, and examples & challenges from our members are what helps keep these agencies accountable . . . for now.

Given this experience, while serving on the Board of Directors this past year, I proposed that keeping agencies accountable for inconsistent decisions needs to be an AILA priority, whether we're dealing with I-601As or H-1Bs that are killing small employers but sail through for many of the big guys. AILA has now made this priority part of our annual plan. I want to be on a board to make sure we follow through.

Similarly, liaison work on both the national and local level is crucial to getting through the red tape. As a chapter officer for the past four years and liaison on the national level, I have first-hand exposure to the national and local liaison systems. I know we can be better at it. If elected to the board, I will focus on identifying ways to improve the use of our national liaison inquiry system, other areas that liaison assistance should be expanded, and making local liaison assistance easy to find via Infonet.

- **Promoting AILA Support For Impact at the Regional Level Where State Bills Threaten Immigration Practice**

AILA Needs to Have Impact at the State Level, Too, Especially When Chapters Cannot Afford Lobbyists to Fight Harmful Legislation That Moves Fast and wreaks havoc in its wake. As for staying relevant to Congress and the media and benefitting from warnings ahead of time of adverse legislation coming down the pipeline, capitalizing on the Congressional buddy program by again offering publications about what immigration attorneys do and differentiating us from notarios, is helpful at the federal level. A liaison should be appointed to help chapters address harmful state legislation, prepare for committee hearings, and strategize on how to create a lasting impact when State and municipal laws are introduced that restrict and regulate immigration practice (including harmful DUI bills, post-conviction relief bills, and business and professional code laws that impact our ability to contract with clients).

As many chapters cannot afford a full time lobbyist, it falls on the chapters to stay relevant to their state and local legislators who are in power to create or stop laws that affect immigration practice in their state. The problem with Chapters as with any volunteer organization is the changing of chapter leadership and as a result, the cyclical nature of involvement and activism from one Executive Board term to the next.

If elected to the Board, I would promote the creation of a national liaison or team in charge of monitoring state bills to help deter the harm this transition period between one board and the next can create to immigration practice.

- **Encouraging Expansion of Cost-Saving Benefits That Make Membership And In-Person Conference Attendance More Affordable and Encouraging Member Retention**

We Need to Reach the Needs of Members AILA Doesn't See and Stay Relevant and Valuable to Those Who Don't Attend AILA Events. A constant problem I have seen as an Executive Board member and national liaison is reaching the membership that we do not see, the membership that does not attend national, regional or local conferences or CLE events. We need to keep these members connected. AILA



national has made it easier for us by offering free podcasts to members and other free resources to keep our members in the loop.

But consistent streaming and member purchases of previously streamed video feed of live CLE events would connect the members even further, which is just one of the changes I would encourage and work with AILA to implement if I was elected to the Board.

AILA So Ca is in talks now with a national CLE provider that provides CLE streaming because after multiple inquiries with AILA national, AILA has yet to have this service available to chapters and there is no planned implementation date. Just making this change could help retain and attract membership who can view live CLEs from the comfort of their desks and enhance the financial ability of chapters to donate more to AILA efforts such as Artesia and improve AILA's overall bottom line for splitting fees with the chapters.



Teaching. *Basics of Immigration Law to ESL Students*, El Monte Adult School

The “Cost of Membership” Problem. We need alternative ways to enforce the value of membership. Agora, free podcasts and the myriad ways of delivery of CLE to a member are all helpful in enforcing this value. But in my years as liaison and Executive Board member with AILA, the most common complaint I hear is the cost of membership. I have brought this to the attention of the AILA Treasurer and AILA's Membership Director and have spoken at length about the history in restructuring dues and the problems presented when I was NMD Chair.

If elected to the Board, I would promote alternative payment plans that expand our currently limited membership options for solos, new members, and small firms (who want to expand AILA membership to all of their associates but are otherwise financially burdened to do so all at once).

I have many ideas to expand current offerings that only AILA can provide including those that will help with the practice of running a firm such as the training of new associates, provide an all-in-one resource book combining many of AILA's existing publications to reach a broader audience (more bang for your buck), and more resources to save you time.



I highly recommend hockey for stress relief after a tough day in court.

Passing on the torch – Promoting New Leadership within AILA's national structure. Over 67% of AILA membership has been practicing less than 20 years. Members respect the knowledge and expertise of those members with over 20 years of experience as reflected in the attendance records at the annual national conference. However, for the sake of the organization's future, a growing gap in the governance and specifically, who the members see making decisions that affect all members cannot continue to widen. Members trust an organization made up of other members they “know, like and trust”, much as our individual clients do. There must be a systematic plan put in place to ensure that the torch is passed and new blood recruited and mentored on a consistent, regular basis to keep this experience and age gap from widening so a disconnect does not occur between the governance and its perceived goals of the organization as opposed to the potential differing needs of the membership, itself (nearly 40% of which are considered New

Members, with less than 10 years of experience or under the age of 35).

AILA needs to rethink its plan of volunteer recruitment. Once a year recruitment for national volunteers and chapter volunteers and lobby day is not enough to retain and encourage leadership that we need to rely on to grow as an organization. How does one move from volunteering locally to nationally? Where is the roadmap if one doesn't serve already on a chapter executive board?

If elected to the board, I would encourage development of a new roadmap of what is possible and the many ways one can be involved in AILA that is delivered more systematically and regularly to all membership, which would not only help in promoting and mentoring future leaders but would also likely increase retention of membership as AILA demonstrates to members that the organization cares about their vision, opinions, and wants their involvement.

- **Promoting More Transparency in AILA Governance.**

Governance: AILA can better promote its governance in two ways. First, AILA has been under fire for lack of transparency in recent years.

If elected to the Board, I would promote more access to Board meetings by AILA members. Members should be allowed to listen to Board meetings as they happen through a live telephonic feed.

This would not allow members to add comments at that time, to preserve Board efficiency, but it could have the side benefit of promoting a higher turnout at AILA elections and discussion between membership and BOG of issues critical to the membership.

We need to stay in touch with the membership and make sure we are representing their needs as they evolve.

If elected to the Board, I would encourage Board members to host their own quarterly telephonic conference calls based on geographic areas to allow local members to call in with their concerns and issues on AILA governance and input on goal formation in AILA's annual plan, so we stay abreast of what common themes among membership are emerging on a timely basis.



Lobby Day 2012 with Pasadena, CA Representative Adam Schiff

A disconnect between what BOG does and what the local member knows BOG does despite the Board minutes appearing on AILA's website (which many members won't take the time to read or look for). Board members, if assigned to particular geographic areas (and given access to the listservs or Chapter Chairs are instructed to disseminate email) could summarize major issues discussed at the board, remind membership of what issues are coming up, and alert to new developments. Save membership time!

Your Life in AILA Can be Better . . . With Heather.

- **I Can Identify With Your Practice Needs & Bring Those to the Board, Having Worked in Solo, Small Firm, and Medium Firm Practice Settings.**

My strengths as a leader for the BOG come first, from my experience with AILA, itself. I have seen AILA governance, programs, and opportunities presented from multiple vantage points - as a member at large, an Executive Board member in a large chapter, a local Chapter liaison and national liaison, local

and national speaker and writer, and especially while serving on the New Member Division Steering Committee for four years. I can identify with multiple types of members ranging from solos to small firms to corporate giants who have different needs ranging from help with their cases and agency problems, need for local mentors, programs and updates on legal developments that affect their cases, and an understanding about the business and financial realities that affect their ability to practice.

I am open to your concerns. I understand “the business” of running an immigration firm. This experience helps me identify with a majority of our membership, which enables me to better serve their needs as a whole. I worked for a mid-size immigration firm with 17 other lawyers early in my career, then transitioned to solo practice for 12 years, then transitioned my solo practice to a small firm, overseeing the work of two other associates. I understand the business needs and financial constraints felt by solos and small firms, which make up a majority of our membership. This includes the need for quick and timely information, help with trouble cases, and financially-reasonable dues structure, CLE opportunities, and vendor opportunities.



Skiing/boarding, skydiving, scuba diving. Any adrenaline sport (really), caffeine and classic rock keeps me going... and fighting the good fight.

I am an approachable, friendly person with an open-door policy both to my own members in the So Ca Chapter that I currently chair and members across the country that come to me for advice. As a former solo, I relied on other immigration attorneys in AILA when I was first starting out and have built up an invaluable network of colleagues I still rely on to this day. I know how valuable AILA membership can be. Even though our organization is large, it doesn't have to feel intimidating or out of touch to our members who are not actively involved in its governance. My approachable and friendly demeanor helps balance out my lack of reservation in challenging an opinion, motion, or decision that I believe will not be in the membership's best interests.

I am down to earth, get to the point, tell it to you straight kind of gal who understands there is a balance that needs to be struck between the good of the organization and the needs of particular section of membership, which may not always agree. As a board member now as Chapter Chair, previously as the NMD Steering Committee chair, and as a guest for the past four years as an Executive Board member of our chapter visiting the BOG meetings, I have been a vocal member of the Board, bringing up issues of concern, challenging decisions and proposals that could isolate the organization further from its membership or harm the organization. I do not shy away from controversy, new ideas, and the unpopular opinion if I believe it represents our membership's best interests. We have responsibilities to keep the organization alive, focus on its future, relevance, and viability and promote its mission to make impactful immigration change. I believe we can do both at the same time.

I would deeply appreciate your trust and confidence in voting for me for the Board of Governors.

Warm Regards,

Heather L. Poole, Esq.

Below is more information about me, my involvement in AILA, my practice areas, and pro bono work

• ***Contributions to AILA at a national, state or local level***

National Level:

Member, USCIS National Benefit Center Liaison Committee (2013 - present)

Moderated, I-601A Update WebCLE panel (Feb 2015)

Drafted membership-wide practice pointers on I-601A cases

Handled NBC Member Inquiries and Participated in Conference Calls with NBC

Member, National Publications Board (2011-2012)

Chair, National New Member Division Steering Committee & Board of Governors (2012/2013)

Nominating Committee Chair (2014)

Vice Chair & Editor, *New Member Division E-News* (2011)

At Large Member (2008-2011)

“Taste of” San Jose Host: *Tips for Filing Convincing I-601/I-601As: Strategies for Making Your Case ‘Unique’ Among the Masses* (2014)

“Taste of” Nashville Co-Host: *The Evolving World of I-601 Waivers* (2012)

So Ca Chapter Level:

Chair (2014-present), serving again on national Board of Governors (2014/2015)

- *provide frequent backstory for positive media immigration stories*
- *challenged the rocket docket due process problems during the UAC crisis in LA immigration court*
- *led efforts to link pro bono attorneys with UAC cases, and*
- *testified in state legislature to counter attacks by the state to overly regulate immigration practice;*

Vice Chair (2013-2014)

- *organized monthly CLE offerings for entire membership;*
- *organized & promoted only AILA Ski CLE conference;*
- *rehailed website to stop access by notarios;*

Treasurer (2012-2013)

- *digitized financial, historical, and current chapter records as well as CLE records;*

Secretary (2011–2012)

- *conducted monthly CIS meetings with District Director Phyllis Coven*

Chair, New Members Division (2006-2008)

Pro Bono Liaison (2004)

NDA/Lobby Day participant (2014, 2012)

Conference Planning Committee, California Chapters Conference (2015)

AILA Speaking Engagements:

Speaker & Moderator, “Complicated Affidavit of Support Issues”, American Immigration Lawyers Association Annual Conference, National Harbor, MD (*confirmed June 2015*)

Speaker, “So I Fibbed About My Swings and Stole That Ball Marker: Preparing Strong Traditional I-601 Cases for CMTs, Misrepresentation, and Smuggling”, Winter CLE Conference, American Immigration Lawyers Association Southern California Chapter, Palm Springs, CA (February 2015)

Speaker & Moderator, "I-601A Filing Developments", American Immigration Lawyers Association, Live Audio Seminar (Internet) (February 2015)

Speaker, "Advanced Family Immigration", American Immigration Lawyers Association Annual California Chapters Conference, San Jose, CA (November 2014)

Speaker, "Advanced Affidavit of Support Issues" American Immigration Lawyers Association Annual Conference, Boston, MA (June 2014)

Speaker, "Provisional and Traditional Unlawful Presence Waivers (I-601s and I-601a)", Annual California Chapters Conference, American Immigration Lawyers Association, Anaheim, CA (November 2013)

Speaker, "Representing and Defending Marriage Fraud Cases", American Immigration Lawyers Association, Live Audio Seminar (Internet) (August 2013)

Speaker, "Notices of Intent to Deny and Requests for Further Evidence in Family Cases", American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) Annual Conference, San Francisco, CA (June 2013)

Speaker, "Avoiding the Long Lift Lines: Provisional Waivers", AILA So Ca Annual Winter in the Snow CLE Conference, Mammoth Mountain Ski Resort, Mammoth Lakes, CA (April 2012)

Speaker, "Don't Fear the Mountain: I-601 Workshop" AILA So Ca Annual Winter in the Snow CLE Conference, Mammoth Mountain Ski Resort, Mammoth Lakes, CA (April 2012)

Speaker & Moderator, "Representing the Difficult Client [Individuals with Mental Disabilities in Immigration Court, Business Clients in the Removal Context, Detained Clients, and Clients with former Domestic Violence Allegations]" AILA California Chapters Conference (November 2012)

Speaker, "Modern Marriage and Family Issues Before USCIS and on Appeal," American Immigration Lawyers Association California Chapters Conference, San Francisco, CA (November 2011)

Speaker, "I-751 and Waivers: Removing the Conditions on Residency" Fundamentals, American Immigration Lawyers Association National Conference, National Harbor, MD (June 2011)

Speaker, "VAWA (Violence Against Women Act) Basics", American Immigration Lawyers Association New Member Division, Southern California Chapter, Los Angeles, CA (August 2010)

AILA Publications

"Setting Client Expectations in I-601A Waiver Cases", (co-authored with D. Long and J. Mills), American Immigration Lawyers Association (February 2015)

"Practice Tips for Arguing Financial Hardship in I-601A Waiver Cases", Practice Pointer, American Immigration Lawyers Association National Benefit Center Liaison Committee, published on www.aila.org, AILA InfoNet Doc. No. 14122342 (posted Dec. 23, 2014)

"Advanced Affidavit of Support Issues", (co-authored with D. Penn & G. Rodriguez), *Immigration Practice Pointers: Tips for Handling Complex Cases*, American Immigration Lawyers Association (June 2014)

“Working with Potential ‘Reason to Believe’ Determinations” [in I-601 Unlawful Presence Provisional Waiver Cases], (co-authored with V. Guerrero, Esq.) American Immigration Lawyers Association 26th Annual AILA *California Chapters Conference Handbook* (November 2013)

“Notices of Intent to Deny and Requests for Further Evidence in Family Cases” (co-authored with Mo Goldman & David Isaacson), American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) (June 2013)

“The ‘Challenging’ Client Relationship – Working with Uncooperative, Disabled, Criminally Accused, or Deportable Immigration Clients”, *AILA California Chapters Conference Handbook* (November 2012)

“Modern Marriage and Family Issues Before USCIS and On Appeal” (co-author with I. Shugall & A. Padilla), *AILA California Chapters Conference Handbook* (November 2011)

“Annotations to Form I-751, Petition to Remove Conditions on Residence”, *Forms & Fundamentals* (co-authored with G. Jacobs), American Immigration Lawyers Association (2011 ed.)

“The V Visa: a New LIFE Form”, *Immigration & Nationality Law Handbook*, American Immigration Lawyers Association (2001 Ed.)

- ***My practice area(s) (and Geographic area).***

I focus on complex family-based immigration law, including related deportation defense and citizenship cases. A large percentage of my practice is made up of I-601/I-601A inadmissibility waivers, VAWA, CLPR waivers, family-based IVs and adjustment cases, and NIV waivers, with clients ranging from the engineering and IT fields to sales, customer service, government/police and social work/health fields.

I am licensed in the State of California and have offices in Costa Mesa, CA (Orange County) and Pasadena, CA (Los Angeles County).

- ***Demonstrated Commitment to Pro Bono Work***

Volunteer Attorney, Los Angeles County Bar Association Barrister’s Domestic Violence Project, Pasadena, CA (2001 – present).

Volunteer every month in Pasadena Superior Court, assisting *in pro per* domestic violence survivors obtain temporary protection orders.

Volunteer Attorney Esperanza Immigrant Rights Project (Catholic Charities of Los Angeles) (2014 – present).

Represent detained immigrants in *Rodriguez* custody hearings and asylum, withholding, and CAT cases in Adelanto, CA.

Recipient, The Hon. Benjamin Aranda III Outstanding Public Service Award, Los Angeles County Bar Association (For 900 hours of volunteer work over the past decade advising and helping prepare temporary restraining orders for in pro per survivors of domestic violence in Los Angeles Superior Court) (June 2013)

Recipient, Commendation, Stop Violence Grant Office, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, CA (2007)

Recipient, Commendation, National Domestic Violence Hotline (2005)

Recipient, Commendation, Project Sister Rape Crisis Center, Pomona, CA, (2007)

Recipient, Commendation, Haven House Domestic Violence Shelter (oldest in the US), (2006)

Speaker, “Immigration Options for Abused Immigrants”, presented at

- Sheppard’s Door Domestic Violence Resource Center Advocate Training (March 2014)
- Glendale Commission on the Status of Women (October 2012, October 2009)
- Haven House Domestic Violence Shelter - quarterly training of advocates & hotline workers) (2004 – 2012)
- Los Angeles Commission on Assaults Against Women Legal Assistance Project (2005, 2006)
- Peace Over Violence’s Legal Assistance Project (2006)
- Coalition for Mental Health Professionals, Inc. (community family wellness center), East Los Angeles (2003)
- PeaceTalks, Inc. Advocate Training, Los Angeles Police Department (2003, 2004)
- Pasadena/Altadena Violence Prevention Coalition (2005)
- Project Sister Rape Crisis Center - quarterly training of advocates & hotline workers (2002 – 2011)
- Glendale Episcopal Church Regional Leadership Training (2006)

Guest Lecturer, “Understanding the Route to Permanent Residency and Legal Status”, presented at

- El Monte Adult School ESL Classes (2003 – 2011; biannual lectures)
- Pasadena City College’s “Discovering PCC Day” (2006)

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I can be reached at heather@humanrightsattorney.com or 877.486.2678.
For more information about me, visit www.humanrightsattorney.com.

Thanks for voting!