



AMERICAN GATEWAYS

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

August 2023

From the Desk of Rebecca Lightsey, Co-Executive Director

Texas remains in the news on immigration issues, including the current lawsuits and debate over the buoys in the Rio Grande River. We here at American Gateways believe the real solution is comprehensive immigration reform.


This month, we share details on what a real solution would include. The *San Antonio Express News* [published this](#) on Sat, August 18.

OPINION // COMMENTARY

Commentary: Real asylum reform would recognize humanity, address root causes of immigration

Edna Yang and Rebecca Lightsey, For the Express-News

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Migrants walk the Rio Grande between buoys and razor wire near Eagle Pass. This is the reality of our southern border, and it reflects the need for asylum reform that honors humanity and ensured due process. Jerry Lara/San Antonio Express-News

Imagine the police threatening, beating and jailing you for expressing your political opinions. Imagine a man kidnapping you until you agree to marry him. Imagine having your family members targeted and killed because of their religious beliefs. It could be enough to force you to flee the country you love, leaving your family behind.

These are the real stories of people who made one of the most difficult decisions of their lives. They left everyone they love and a place they called home because they were afraid of what would happen if they stayed. Asylum-seekers make the treacherous journey to the United States to seek protection because they have no other options.

But many arrive in a country that says it believes in freedom, equality and due process under the law but greets asylum-seekers [with harsh and restrictive policies](#) that deny them the ability to apply for protection. They find [man-made barriers](#) that are a threat to their lives and face [imprisonment](#) — even though they have not broken any criminal laws by seeking asylum.

This is the harsh reality migrants fleeing harm meet at our southern border. This is no way to welcome people fleeing persecution.

For decades, we at American Gateways and the legal aid organizations in Texas that we partner with have been helping people as they flee violence and desperation, seeking a

better life in the United States. We have seen thousands of people like this.

Like federal, state and local authorities, we expect our clients to follow applicable laws, and we help them understand their rights and responsibilities as asylum-seekers. But the backlogs in the asylum system, mixed messages and ever-changing processes don't make adhering to the laws easy.

As longtime providers of free and low-cost legal services to immigrants and refugees in Central Texas, we know the vast majority of immigrants attempting to enter the United States are fleeing torture and persecution.

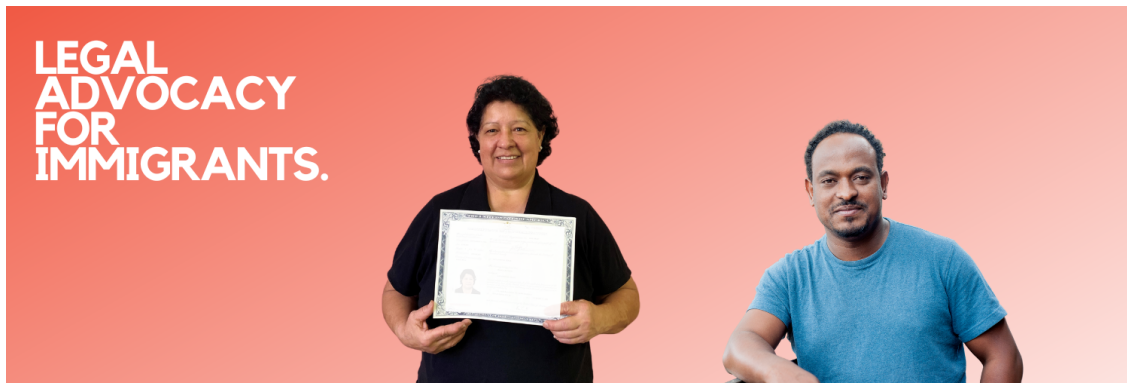
We need to stop the political rhetoric and border photo ops and replace them with policies that meet the needs of people fleeing persecution and working to make a better life for themselves and their new communities. We need to recognize the humanity in those who are fleeing and treat them with dignity and respect.

Here's how we would reform the asylum process today if we could:

- Comprehensive immigration reform would make the system match today's realities. Families should remain together, policies would be clear and widely understood, and archaic backlogs and wait times would fade away.
- More resources for the resolution of asylum claims would speed up the process. We should support the communities that receive asylum-seekers instead of funneling millions of dollars to enforcement programs and restrictive, ineffective policies. Let's provide more funding to hire asylum officers and immigration judges, and support communities and agencies working to assist asylum-seekers.
- Universal representation in immigration proceedings would ensure every asylum-seeker has quality legal representation. Universal representation creates a system that is fair and gives immigrants the opportunity to access the rights they are entitled to under U.S. law.

Our immigration system allows people fleeing violence and persecution to show up at our borders and request asylum. Our current process for allowing people to do so is flawed and outdated, and as a result, it makes people wait in dangerous conditions, separates them from their families and wastes taxpayers' money on needlessly detaining them.

Let's make our asylum process smoother, more transparent and more equitable so people see this country as the beacon of liberty and freedom it was meant to be.



Supporting our El Salvadorian Neighbors

Thanks for all our volunteers & pro bono attorneys who helped us at our TPS Clinic on Saturday, August 19, where we assisted more than a dozen El Salvadorian TSP recipients.

Upcoming Volunteer Opportunities and Events

We have several opportunities coming up for volunteering and supporting our clients:

- Citizenship Clinic, San Antonio- September 16. Contact Erika Gonzalez, erikag@americangateways.org for more info.
- Citizenship Clinic, Austin - October 21. Contact Edna Yang, ednay@americangateways.org for more info.
- Immigrant Justice Fundraising Luncheon - October 12. Contact Alyssa Gooch, alyssag@americangateways.org for more info.
- Temporary Protected Status Clinic, Austin - date TBD. Contact Edna Yang, ednay@americangateways.org for more info.

Staff Anniversaries

Join us in celebrating our staff in their work anniversaries!

[Lorena Avila](#), Legal Caseworker - 7 years

[Benicio Diaz](#), Managing Attorney - 13 years

[Elisa Jelley](#), Staff Attorney - 1 year

Want to Donate?

Donate today to provide access to justice to immigrants. Your partnership allows us to provide critical legal services to individuals and families seeking safety, hope, and freedom.

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