

## **Case Management and Asylum Seekers Briefing**

**March 3, 2021**

### **Speaker Biographies and Organizational Information**

**Olga Byrne** has over 15 years of experience supporting and advocating for the rights of noncitizens in the US. As Director of Immigration for the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Olga oversees immigration and asylum services across IRC's network of 26 US offices. Prior to joining IRC, Olga was senior researcher at Human Rights First where she conducted research and fact finding on US asylum and refugee policy. From 2013-2015, Olga launched an initiative at the Fordham Law School Feerick Center for Social Justice to improve policies and practices related to children in the context of migration. Olga was a 2011-2012 US Fulbright-Schuman Scholar in the European Union, and from 2006 to 2011, worked at the Vera Institute of Justice on national programs to increase access to legal services for adults and children in U.S. immigration custody. Olga is an Adjunct Professor at Fordham University School of Law where she teaches a course on migration.

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) helps people whose lives and livelihoods are shattered by conflict and disaster to survive, recover, and gain control of their future. Founded in 1933, the IRC is at work today in over 40 countries globally and 26 U.S. cities. The IRC's Resettlement, Asylum and Integration (RAI) department creates opportunities for refugees and other vulnerable migrants to thrive in the United States and Europe. RAI serves more than 40,000 individuals each year through a diverse portfolio of programs aimed at five core outcomes: Health, Safety, Economic Wellbeing, Education and Power.

**Karen Siciliano Lucas** is the Immigration Justice Campaign Director at the American Immigration Council. Previously, Karen worked at the American Immigration Lawyers Association as the Associate Director for Advocacy and at the Catholic Legal Immigration Network as the State and Local Advocacy Attorney. Karen began her legal career as a litigation associate at the New York firm Schulte Roth & Zabel LLP. She has a J.D. from Georgetown University Law Center and an B.A. from Princeton University.

**American Immigration Council:** The American Immigration Council works to strengthen America by shaping how America thinks about and acts towards immigrants and immigration and by working toward a more fair and just immigration system that opens its doors to those in need of protection and unleashes the energy and skills that immigrants bring.

**Immigration Justice Campaign:** The Immigration Justice Campaign is a joint initiative of the American Immigration Council and the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA). Our mission is to fight for due process and justice for detained immigrants and advocate to end immigration detention by deploying a corps of 13,000 volunteers across the country and by testing innovative strategies to scale pro bono detained removal defense.

**Michelle N. Méndez** is the Director of the Defending Vulnerable Populations Program at CLINIC. Before directing the Defending Vulnerable Populations section, Michelle oversaw CLINIC's role in the CARA Pro Bono Project in Dilley, Texas, which focuses on providing legal assistance to detained asylum-seeking

mothers and children. Prior to joining CLINIC, she served as senior managing attorney in the Immigration Legal Services Program at Catholic Charities for the Archdiocese of Washington, where she began as an Equal Justice Works Fellow sponsored by DLA Piper and responded to the unaccompanied children exodus, which included managing the Legal Orientation Program for Custodians of Unaccompanied Children. Mendez has taught the Immigration Litigation Clinic at Catholic University Columbus School of Law, served as a Visiting Clinical Lecturer in Law at Yale Law School, and assisted the Immigrant Rights Clinic at the University of Baltimore School of Law. Michelle serves as the Program Director for the National Institute for Trial Advocacy's Immigration Public Programs and, in 2019, NITA awarded her the Robert E. Oliphant Award for Outstanding Service. Michelle was also lucky to receive AILA's Joseph Minsky Young Lawyer Award in 2015, in part because of her leadership on MD's special immigrant juvenile status law. She is proud to be an immigrant, originally from Medellín, Colombia.

CLINIC Description: Founded in 1988, CLINIC promotes the dignity and protected the rights of immigrants in partnership with a dedicated network of legal immigration programs. CLINIC's network, originally comprised of 17 programs has now increased to close to 400 diocesan and community-based programs in almost every state and the District of Columbia. The network includes faith-based institutions, farmworker programs, domestic violence shelters, ethnic community-focused organizations, libraries and other entities that serve immigrants and employs roughly 2,300 attorneys and accredited representatives. CLINIC fights for the rights of immigrants through a multi-faceted approach that focuses on five core areas: training and legal support, capacity building, religious immigration services, advocacy, and defending vulnerable populations. For over 30 years, CLINIC has been on the cutting edge of training nonprofit immigration legal service providers to provide affordable, quality legal representation to immigrants. CLINIC sustains and helps expand the capacity of our network of nonprofit programs that serve close to 500,000 immigrants every year, represents religious workers of all faiths coming to the United States, and engages in administrative advocacy. Finally, CLINIC cultivates projects that support and defend vulnerable immigrant populations by: providing information and referrals for asylum seekers at the U.S.-Mexico border and educating them about their rights; filing affirmative litigation in federal courts to challenge policies that hurt immigrants; reuniting formerly separated families; representing immigrants remotely on motions to reopen a prior deportation order; increasing legal representation for those in removal proceedings and in detention; providing public education on immigration law and policies; and advocating for fair and just immigration policies that acknowledge the inherent dignity and value of all people.

**Katharina Obser** is currently the acting director of the Women's Refugee Commission's Migrant Rights and Justice program, where she advocates on the national level for the rights of women, children, and families seeking protection. WRC is a research and advocacy organization that works to improve the lives and protect the rights of women, children, and youth displaced by conflict and crisis. The Migrant Rights & Justice program in particular focuses on access to protection of women, children, and families at the U.S. border and in the United States, as well as regional protection issues.