

# **Protection for Immigrant Children: Special Immigrant Juvenile Status and Beyond**

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# Introductions

- Judge Ramona Gonzalez
  - La Crosse County Circuit Court
- Leslye E. Orloff
  - National Immigrant Women's Advocacy Project, American University, Washington College of Law
- Zadora Bolin
  - National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges

# Learning Objectives

By the end of this training you will be better able to:

- Carryout the role Congress delegated to State Court Judges in Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) and U Visa cases
- Identify minors before your court who are SIJS eligible and know how to issue SIJS predicate orders
- Understand the role Congress and the Department of Homeland Security created for judges and other judicial officers in U visa certification in cases of immigrant crime victims before the court

# US Demographics (2014)\*

- ❖ Total foreign born population – 42,391,794
- ❖ 13.3% of the country's ~318.9 million people are foreign born
  - 47.1% naturalized citizens
  - ~31% legal permanent residents (2013 DHS data)
  - ~4.4% temporary visa holders
  - ~17.5% undocumented (includes pending VAWA, Us, Ts, SIJS)
  - 36.3% rise in immigrant population from 2000 to 2014
  - 21% of U.S. population speak a language other than English at home
- ❖ Proportion of new immigrants
  - 47.1% entered in or before the 1990s
  - 34.5 % entered 2000 -2009
  - 18.3 % entered 2010 or after
- ❖ 23% of all parents with young children are immigrants
- ❖ 25% of children under age 18 have one or more immigrant parents
  - 88% of these children are native-born U.S. citizens

*\*Source: Migration Policy Institute Data Hub (January 2017) and DHS Population Estimates (November 2016)*

# US – Countries/Regions of Origin & Limited English Proficiency (LEP)(2014)\*

- ▶ **Asia – 26.7%**
  - ▶ China/Taiwan (5.9%)
  - ▶ India (5.2%)
  - ▶ Philippines (4.5%)
  - ▶ Vietnam (3.0%)
  - ▶ Korea (2.5%)
- ▶ **Latin America – 51.6%**
  - ▶ Mexico (27.6%)
  - ▶ Other Central America (4.7%)
  - ▶ South America (6.7%)
  - ▶ Caribbean (9.4%)
  - ▶ El Salvador (3.1%)
- ▶ **Europe – 11.2%**
  - ▶ Eastern Europe (4.9%)
- ▶ **Oceania – 0.6%**
- ▶ **Africa – 4.6%**
- ▶ **Middle East – 3.4%**
- ▶ **Non-U.S. North America – 1.9%**
- ▶ **Language spoken**
  - ▶ 21% of people in the U.S. speak language other than English at home
  - ▶ 49.7% of foreign born persons are LEP - speak English less than “very well”

*\*Source: Migration Policy Institute Data Hub (January 2017)*

# DHS Victim Protection Memos/Guidance

- DHS victim witness protection memo
- Humanitarian release for caregiving parents
- 384 DHS computer system (VAWA, T visas, U visas)
- Memorandum on DHS detention priorities
  - See Web library [www.niwap.org/go/sji](http://www.niwap.org/go/sji) for:
    - Bench Card: Immigration Rights of Battered Immigrant Spouses, Children and other Immigrant Crime Victims
    - DHS Victim Protection Resources and Guidance

# Legal Immigration Status Options for Non-citizen Crime Victims and Children

- VAWA self-petition
  - Abused spouses/children of US citizens and lawful permanent residents
  - Abused parents of U.S. citizens over 21 years of age
- VAWA cancellation of removal
  - Abused spouses/children of US citizen and lawful permanent residents protection from deportation
- Battered spouse waiver
  - Abused spouses of US citizens with two-year conditional permanent residency
- Asylum
  - Well founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, social group
  - Domestic violence as gender based asylum
- U visa
  - Has been, is being or is likely to be helpful in the detection, investigation, prosecution, conviction or sentencing
  - Substantial harm from criminal activity
- T visa and Continued Presence
  - Victims of severe forms of human trafficking
- Special Immigrant Juvenile (SIJS)
  - Children abused, battered, abandoned or neglected by one or both parents
- Deferred Action (DACA)
  - Deferred action for child arrivals including Dreamers
- DHS Prosecutorial Discretion
  - “low priority” for removal immigrants -- survivors, witnesses, parents, children, elderly, disabled
  - Humanitarian detention release

# Access to Legal Immigration Status:

- Provides a path to economic security
  - Work authorization
  - Drivers licenses
  - Financial aid to attend university
  - Health care exchange access upon filing
    - Benefits vary by state and immigration status
- Removes fear of deportation, promotes stability and facilitates access to:
  - Nurturing family relationships
  - Stable school environment
  - Mentors, role models and community support



# Immigrant Children in Family Court

- May have options for legal immigration status
  - Child's own application
  - Child included in parent's application
- Immigrant children's best interests are promoted when state courts:
  - Issue detailed findings required for children to apply for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status
  - Sign U visa certifications
  - Award custody to non-abusive parents, family members, guardians
    - Without regard to the custodian's immigration status
- Distribute U.S. DHS legal rights for victims/children brochures

# Overview Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS)

- Humanitarian protection that provides a path to lawful permanent residency
- Created by Congress in 1990 to help and protect foreign born children living in the United States
  - who have been abused, or abandoned, or neglected by at least one parent.

# Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS)

- Immigration relief for unmarried children under the age of majority under state law who have been
  - Victims of abuse, abandonment, neglect
  - By at least **one parent**
- State Court Findings Required As Evidence requires
  - State court with jurisdiction over care, custody, dependency or placement of the child
  - has issued a court order, finding, or declaration on three statutorily required issues
- The state court order does **not** award SIJS
  - **ONLY DHS can provide legal immigration status**

# State Court Findings Needed for SIJS

## \*State Law Applies To Each\*

1. The court issued regarding the child care, custody, dependency or placement of an immigrant child with
  - An individual (e.g. non-abusive parent, grandparent, kinship care, guardian, next friend) OR
  - State agency, private agency, including foster care system
2. Reunification of the child is not viable with a parent due to the parent's abuse, abandonment, or neglect
3. It is not in the child's best interest to return to their home country
  - Best caregiver identification/often not necessary to compare countries

# Apply State Law

- Best Interests
- UCCJEA – Temporary Emergency Jurisdiction

# SIJS: Congressional Goals

- Included a role for state court judges as experts in child best interests, custody, child welfare matters.
- State court expertise:
  - Adjudicating facts of child abuse, neglect and abandonment
  - Issuing orders regarding child care, custody and placement that further the best interests of children
- Only the DHS can issue SIJS & permanent residency
- DHS uses the state court order as evidence in adjudicating the immigration application

# SIJS: State and Federal Roles

## State Courts With Jurisdiction Over Children

- Issue orders providing evidence to help DHS adjudicate SIJS application
- Make findings of fact **under state law** on
  - Custody, dependency, placement, care of a child
  - Child suffered abuse, abandonment, or neglect by at least one parent
  - Parental reunification
  - Child's best interests

## DHS Adjudicators

- Adjudicate application filed by child
- Reviews evidence, including the state court's order, to determine if the child applicant is eligible for SIJS
- Determine if state court order was sought primarily
  - To provide the child relief from harm caused by abuse, abandonment or neglect; OR
  - For immigration purposes

# State Courts Regularly Make Custody & Care Determinations

- Who will be the custodian/guardian of the minor
- Who the minor will live with
- Who will receive child support for the child living with them
- Whether the minor will be committed to the custody of the state or private agency for care, treatment, or rehabilitation
- Issue orders directing the child's care
  - Child support, health care, applying for benefits or services for the child



# All of the Following are Potentially Eligible for SIJS

- A minor who is:
  - Abused, abandoned or neglected
    - In the U.S.
    - In the home country
  - Living with their
    - Non-abusive parent
    - Guardian
    - Adopted parent
    - State foster care
    - Federal foster care (ORR)

# What Kinds of Proceedings Might You See SIJS Eligible Children In?

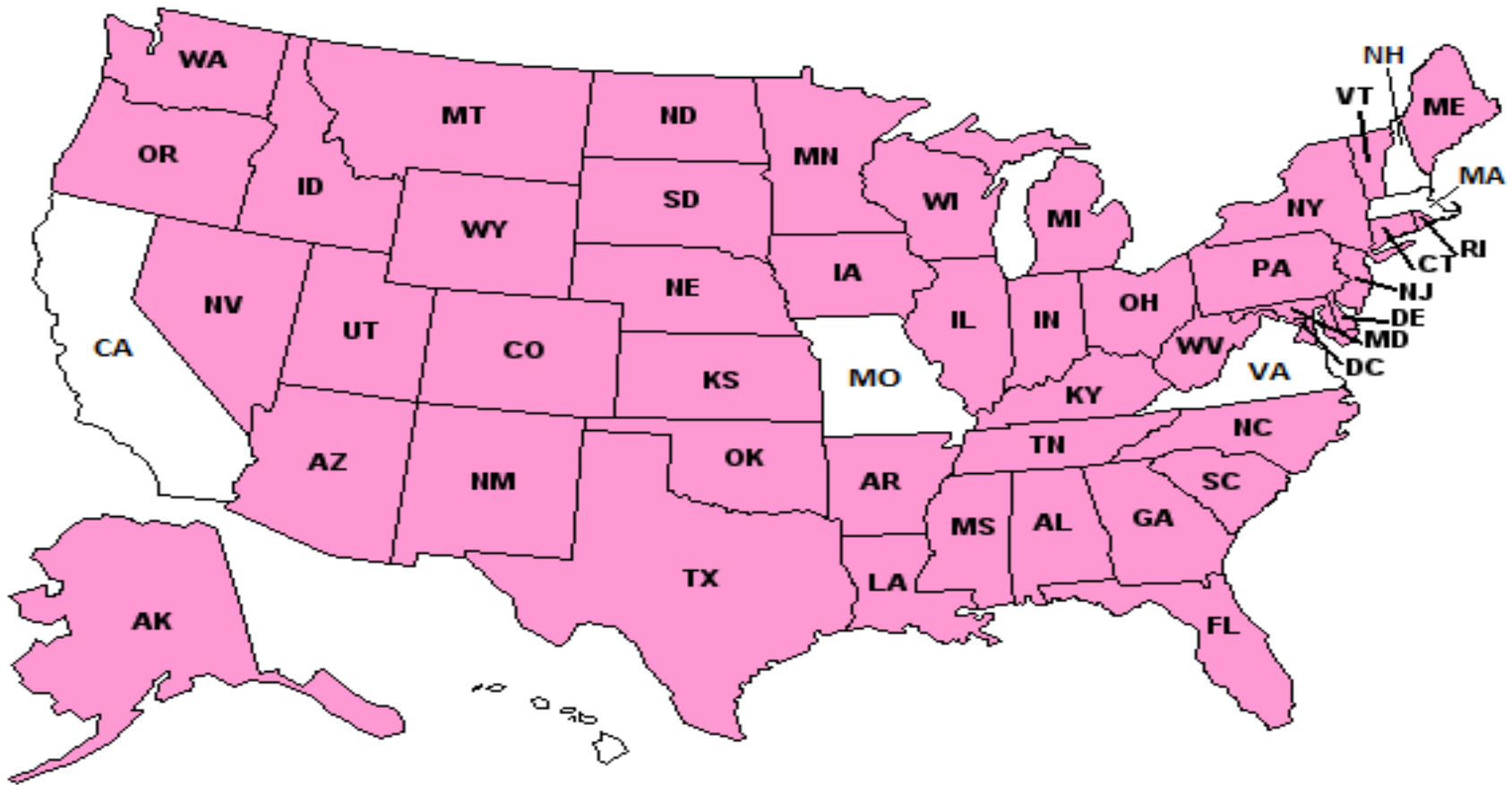
# Types of Proceedings With Jurisdiction To Make SIJS Findings:

- Dependency
- Delinquency
- Termination of parental rights
- Guardianship
- Protection orders
- Paternity
- Child support
- Custody
- Divorce
- Legal Separation
- Adoption
- Motions for a declaratory judgment

Courts with jurisdiction under state law to make judicial determinations regarding the custody, placement, care of children = *juvenile courts* for SIJS immigration purposes

# States With Declaratory Judgment Statutes That Can be Used in SIJS Cases

When under state law the court can take jurisdiction over the care or custody of a child



# SIJS in State Courts

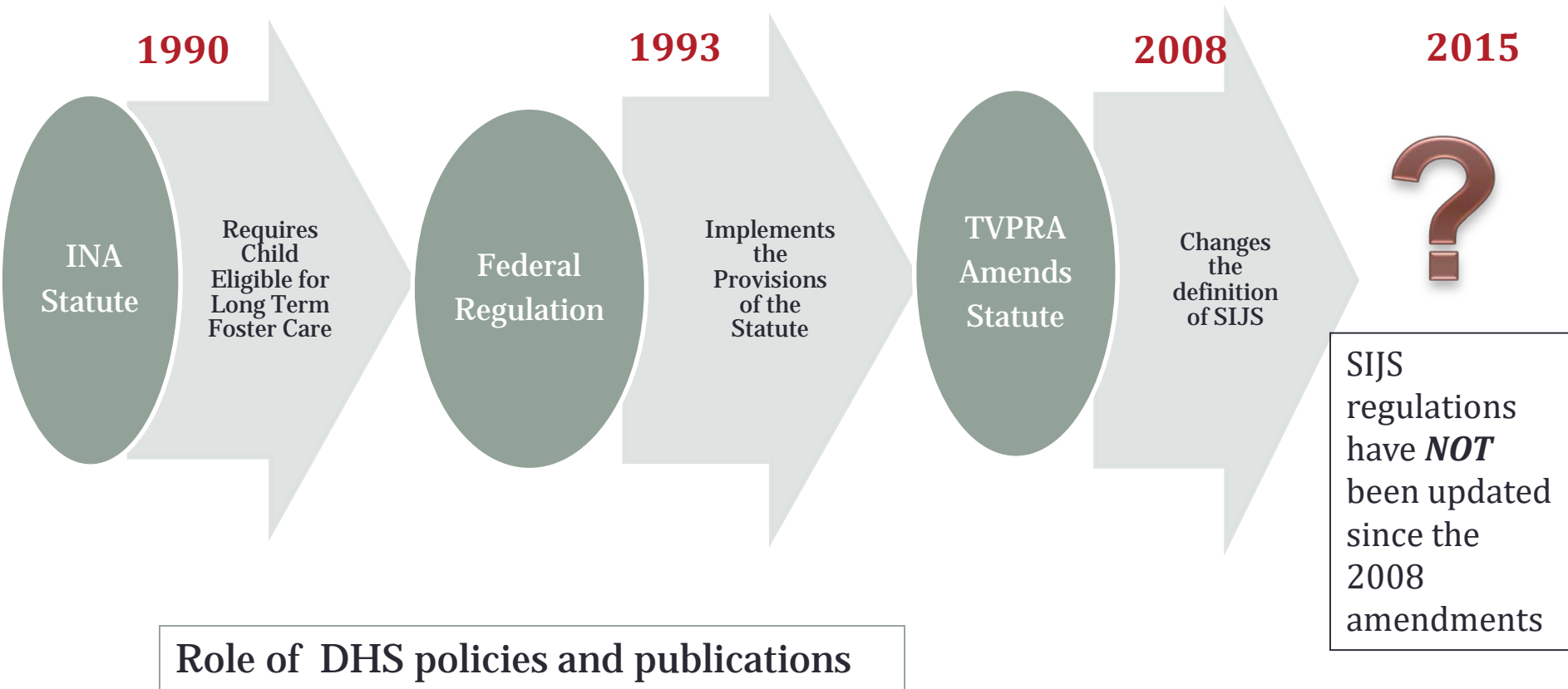
- Many SIJS cases are for 15-17 year old minors
  - State court order + filing before the child ages out
  - Up to age of majority set by state law
- SIJS is an option any time an abused, abandoned or neglected child is not a
  - Citizen or lawful permanent resident

# “One *or* Both Parent” Requirement



A child can receive SIJS findings if they were abused, abandoned or neglected by one parent and are living with the other parent.

# Statute vs. Regulation



# Best Practice for Findings

- Issue orders that demonstrate to DHS that the court made an informed decision
  - Make factual findings regarding abuse, abandonment and/or neglect
    - Separately for each abusive parent
  - Finding that the child is in need of protection as a result of having been abused, abandoned or neglected
  - Trauma research



# Criminal Issues & SIJ Eligibility

- A finding of juvenile delinquency is not a conviction for immigration purposes.
- However, juvenile dispositions can have immigration consequences
  - They can be considered as negative factors in discretionary determinations
  - Some grounds of inadmissibility or deportability do not require a criminal conviction
    - Waivable Offenses
      - Prostitution, drug abuse or addiction, smuggling
    - Non-Waivable Offenses
      - Moral turpitude crimes (theft and shoplifting, murder, spousal or child abuse, fraud, espionage, terrorist activities, genocide, torture)
      - drug crimes (findings and admissions regarding drugs except simple possession of 30 grams or less of marijuana; controlled substances traffickers)
      - multiple criminal convictions (juvenile adjudications are not convictions)
- Under the Youthful Offender Exception, minors tried as adults can avoid CIMT inadmissibility if:
  - (1) they were under 18 years of age at the time of the crime, and
  - (2) five or more years have passed since the commission of the crime or release from any resulting imprisonment

# Case Scenario

The first case on your delinquency docket is Marco, a fifteen year old boy charged with shoplifting. His mother, Maria, is in court as well. Marco's father, Juan, is not present in court. Maria and Juan have been separated for five years and Maria has custody of Marco. The couple separated because Juan was abusive toward Maria and Marco. The abuse began while the family was living in Mexico, but escalated once the family relocated to the United States. Initially the abuse was directed at Maria, but as Marco became older, Juan started abusing him as well. To protect her son, Maria separated from Juan, and was given custody of Marco.

Maria and Marco have been highly cooperative with the juvenile justice department and provided all requested documents, including Marco's Mexican Birth Certificate. Marco has been getting A's and B's in school and has never been in trouble before; however, Maria expressed concern that some of his friends are troublemakers. How would you proceed on this case?

# What Children with SIJ Status Receive

- While case is pending:
  - Protection from deportation and removal
  - As lawfully present children – health care exchanges (no subsidies)
  - Programs and services necessary to protect life and safety

# What Children with SIJ Status Receive

- At approval:
  - Lawful Permanent Residency (separate but usually concurrent filing)
  - Legal work authorization
    - Brings access to state issued driver's licenses and identification cards
  - Eligible for citizenship after 5 years
  - Post secondary educational grants and loans, public and assisted housing
  - Food stamps (only until the immigrant child turns age 19)

**SIJS' may NEVER file family petition for either of the child's natural parents**

# U Visas and U Visa Certification

# U Visa for Immigrant Victims

- A victim of qualifying criminal activity is eligible for a U Visa when:
  - The criminal activity occurred in the U.S. **or** violated U.S. law;
  - The victims possesses information about the crime;
  - The victim has been, is being, or is likely to be helpful in the detection, investigation, prosecution, conviction or sentencing of the offense; and
  - The victim has suffered substantial physical or mental abuse as a result of the victimization

# U Visa Qualifying Criminal Activity

- Domestic violence
- Sexual assault
- Rape
- Incest
- Prostitution
- Torture
- Felonious assault
- Manslaughter
- Murder
- Female genital mutilation
- Kidnapping
- Abduction
- Trafficking
- Involuntary servitude
- Slave trade
- Being held hostage
- Fraud Foreign Labor Contracting
- Peonage
- False Imprisonment
- Blackmail
- Extortion
- Witness tampering
- Obstruction of justice
- Perjury
- Stalking

*Attempt, conspiracy or solicitation to commit any of these crimes any similar activity*

# U Visa Certification: Who Can Certify?

- Federal, state, and local
  - Police, sheriffs, FBI, HSI, ATF...
  - Prosecutors
  - **Judges, Magistrates, Commissioners, Judicial Referees, Masters, Alderman, ALJs, Surrogates, Chancellors**
- Departments of Labor (DOL) and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)
- Child and Elder Abuse investigators and agencies
- Other government agencies



# The U-visa Application Process



*Typical length of process = 28 months*

# Examples of Helpfulness

- Calling 911 to report a crime
- Filing a police report
- Providing a statement to police, prosecutor, court
- Seeking a protection order
- Litigating the abuse as part of a custody case
- Appearing at court in a criminal case
- Serving as a witness in a prior prosecution
- Testimony in a sentencing hearing

# Things to Know About Certifying

- “Do I believe this person was a victim of a qualifying crime?”
- “Did the person assist or willing to assist in detection, investigation, conviction, prosecution and/or sentencing?”
- Question is **NOT**:
  - Is/was there a prosecution?
  - Was there an arrest of the offender?
  - Do I have proof beyond a reasonable doubt?
  - Is this within the statute of limitations?
  - Was there a conviction?

# Helpfulness in the Regulations

- Under the statute, DHS determines whether a victim:
  - has been helpful, is being helpful or is likely to be helpful in the
    - Detection, or Investigation, or Prosecution, or Conviction or Sentencing
- Any helpfulness is sufficient
- Judges and law enforcement may complete U visa certification if they observe or detect a victim's helpfulness
- The investigation, prosecution or case can still be ongoing

# Certifying Judges Will Need to Amend Form

- Judges may amend the language of the form to accurately reflect the basis upon which the judge is signing the certification.
  - Probable cause, findings, rulings
  - Include the type of proceeding and
  - If orders were issued attach a copy of the order
- Judges can should amend current form --examples:
  - Based upon my having probable cause .... I certify”
  - Based upon my issuance of a civil protection order ...I certify”
  - Based on my having presided over the criminal case ... I certify”
  - “Based upon my findings in a [custody/divorce] case of [domestic violence/child abuse] ... I certify”

# U Visa Facts and Benefits

- Only 10,000 U-visas can be granted annually
  - The U visa grants a temporary 4 year stay
- Wait list approval
  - Work authorization ( 28 months)
- Lawful permanent residency after 3 years if
  - Cooperation or not unreasonably refuse to cooperate AND humanitarian need, family unity or public interest
- U.S. citizenship after 5 years of lawful permanent residency+ proof of good moral character

# Minnesota Judicial Ethics Opinion U Visa Certification (June 26, 2015)

- Judge may sign certifications when
  - “adequate basis for the averments made in the certification”
- Certification after the criminal or civil case is completed does not raise impartiality issues
  - In open cases should disclose certification to the parties
- Certification describes immigrant victim’s past/present helpfulness -- Does not vouch for character
- In civil and criminal cases whether to sign a U visa certification is a an issue of law that does not implicate judicial ethics codes

Full Opinion Available at: <http://www.bjs.state.mn.us/file/advisory-opinions/opinion-2015-2-final.pdf>  
Hon. Pendleton also published a training update based on the opinion at <http://pendletonupdates.com/>

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# Technical Assistance and Materials

- Power Point presentations and materials for this conference at [www.niwap.org/go/ncjfcj](http://www.niwap.org/go/ncjfcj)
- Judicial Training Manual at [www.niwap.org/go/sji](http://www.niwap.org/go/sji)
  - **NIWAP Technical Assistance:**
  - Call (202) 274-4457
  - E-mail [info@niwap.org](mailto:info@niwap.org)
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# Questions



# Evaluations



Thank you!