

Boston Bar Association

Statement of Principles Concerning Immigration and Related Issues

The Boston Bar Association (BBA) is a professional association of over 10,000 attorney members. Our mission is to facilitate access to justice, advance the highest standards of excellence for the legal profession, foster a diverse and inclusive professional community, and serve the community at large. As an Association, we have a long history of supporting civil rights, and we believe that our profession has a unique responsibility to promote and uphold the rule of law as a fundamental principle of our nation's democracy.

The BBA recognizes the vital role that immigrants play in our city and state, and has long supported measures to uphold due process and equal protections rights for immigrants. It is largely because of Massachusetts' openness to immigrants that our educational, business, and healthcare institutions are recognized as global leaders. As a professional organization, the BBA is bettered by the valuable contributions of our members and partners who are immigrants, and we affirm our commitment to standing with all immigrant communities in Boston and throughout Massachusetts.

To express its respect for and solidarity with immigrant communities in Massachusetts and to guide its future public policy work, the BBA has adopted the following principles:

Principle 1: Immigration is a defining feature of the American experience. Immigrants play a critical role in the civic, economic, and cultural life of our city, state, and country.

Our country's history, culture, economy, and traditions have been shaped by immigration, and the unique and valuable contributions of immigrants continue to strengthen our civic, economic, and cultural life.

Principle 2: No person's rights or human dignity should be devalued on the basis of immigration or citizenship status.

All human beings are the bearers of fundamental rights and freedoms that are embodied in the United States Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (a declaration adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 to establish a common standard of fundamental human rights that should be protected for all peoples and nations). National governments must respect human rights when people enter their countries, and judicial systems must uphold these rights. The BBA affirms that all human beings have these fundamental rights, regardless of how they entered the United States.

Principle 3: The constitutional right to due process and equal protection, guaranteed to every person regardless of immigration or citizenship status, must be protected and enforced.

The United States Supreme Court has ruled that all people in the United States, including undocumented immigrants, are guaranteed protections under the Constitution's Fifth Amendment (right to due process of law) and Fourteenth Amendment (right to due process and equal protection under the law). The BBA insists that these protections must be fully upheld and enforced.

Principle 4: Every person should have the full and meaningful ability to exercise their rights and to access justice through the legal system regardless of immigration or citizenship status, level of income, or economic circumstance.

The BBA asserts that immigrants, like all other residents of the Commonwealth, should be free to access courthouses, law enforcement agencies, and other governmental agencies without fear that doing so will lead to immigration detention or deportation. The BBA also believes that immigrants in removal proceedings should be provided with a lawyer to ensure they are able to exercise their rights and legal options to the fullest extent possible. Finally, the BBA believes that immigrants must have access to a fair legal process with independent judges when seeking immigration relief.

As lawyers, and as a Bar Association, it is our special calling, privilege, and obligation to be vigilant guardians of the rule of law, and to ensure that it protects all people to whom it extends—including all immigrants—when their rights are under attack.

Need a Lawyer?

For 60+ years the BBA's Lawyer Referral Service has connected people of all income levels with legal help, whether to our member attorneys or to partner organizations offering free legal services. We are happy to talk with you and connect you to the appropriate legal resource. Consultations with the Lawyer Referral Service are free of charge.

Contact the BBA Lawyer Referral Service:

For phone referrals call: (617) 742-0625, 9am-5pm, Monday-Friday

For online referrals, go to: <https://bostonbarlawyer.org/>

The Lawyer Referral Service can refer people of all income levels to regular fee, low fee, or free legal services.

For additional resources on how to connect with free legal services:

Eastern Region Legal Intake Helpline: 617-603-1700 or 1-800-342-5297

Mass Legal Services Legal Resource Finder: <https://www.masslegalservices.org/findlegalaid>

Immigration Legal Services List: <http://miracoalition.org/legal-services>

Do you know your rights?

To learn more about your rights under the law, visit <https://www.miracoalition.org/know-your-rights>. Resources available in multiple languages.

