Hi Everyone,

One of the SFAO points of contact for Afghan asylum cases, Supervisory Asylum Officer, Tammi Ho-Hodson, reached out to me because she heard JFCS is preparing to file a lot of Afghan asylum applications. She wanted to connect on the details and timelines for filing in order to process these applications as smoothly and expeditiously as possible.  I told her about our EBRIF legal working group, and she offered some information to share with all of you. Tammi might also reach out to contact your office to help streamline the scheduling of asylum interviews.

Here are my notes from our informal chat earlier today:

* **Interpreters**. At both the AILA Asylum Office liaison meeting and the Afghan-specific community engagement meeting, the SFAO stated that Afghan asylum applicants can and should bring their own interpreters to the interview. Yet, as I reported to Tammi, we've repeatedly had officers refuse to use these interpreters, relying instead on the telephonic interpreter. Tammi confirmed that Afghans who speak a common language can and should bring their own interpreter to the interview if possible. She explained that the SFAO recently completed another all-staff training on this issue, and that new appointment notices will make this policy clear. Additionally, Tammi advised us to ask for a supervisor (or ask for Tammi specifically) if we have an AO who refuses to use the client's own interpreter. Of course, if the interpreter is not qualified (e.g. they are not competent, they have their own asylum application pending, or they are also a witness in the case, etc.), then the AO may use a telephonic interpreter instead.
* **Scheduling interviews.** Tammi noted that the service centers are experiencing serious backlogs, and it can be helpful to contact the SFAO if we have filed a case and are not getting an interview scheduled within 45 days. I asked if e-filing the I-589 makes a difference. Tammi is looking into this for more information, but she was able to confirm that e-filing eliminates the file movement time, and therefore can help to expedite scheduling at least a little bit.
* **Related cases.** Tammi asks that we notify the SFAO whenever we are filing related cases (i.e. not derivatives, but separate cases with related claims, e.g. adult siblings, etc.). Whenever possible, the SFAO will try to schedule those cases together, or at least with the same officer. Send your notification to *sanfranciscoasylum@uscis.dhs.gov* and copy the Afghan asylum points of contact: *tam-minh.t.ho-hodsdon@uscis.dhs.gov* and *mairead.c.donahey@uscis.dhs.gov**.*
* **Processing times**. I asked Tammi if she can give any indication of how long it will take to receive a decision following the interview. She responded that this is very case specific, and processing times and case outcomes vary widely from case to case. Generally speaking, the SFAO is doing everything possible to comply with the congressional mandate to issue a final decision within 150 days of the I-589 filing. There are exceptional circumstances, which could include pending background checks, which would cause a longer delay. Generally speaking, decisions have been issued in as little as 60 days, but do sometimes take the full 150 days. Basically, Tammi emphasized that there is so much variance that it is really hard to estimate. She also noted that Afghan asylum cases are the top processing priority in the asylum office, and that they are doing everything they can to move these cases along as quickly as possible.
	+ **Related Case Tip.** Tammi reminds us that it will help speed things along if we can provide all of the family relationship documents or secondary evidence with the filing, or at least at the interview, to avoid issuance of an RFE.

Tammi and the SFAO are planning additional community engagement meetings to discuss processing these cases, and she welcomes feedback about our experiences as we go along.