



## Guide to Attending a Master Calendar Hearing Without an Attorney

### *What is a Master Calendar Hearing?*

- Your first few hearings are called Master Calendar Hearings. You will be in the courtroom with many other immigrants.
- Usually, these hearings are very brief. The Judge asks a few basic questions about your name and where you live.
- You will only have to talk to the Judge for a few minutes at these hearings but you must attend any scheduled hearings to have a chance to apply for asylum and remain in the United States.
- Make sure you go to all of your hearings. The Judge can order that you be deported if you miss a court date.
- You have the right to an attorney, but one will not be provided to you by the government. You are also allowed to proceed without one. You should not feel pressured to proceed without one if that is not what you want. You can always ask for more time to find an attorney. Usually, the Judge will give you more time at least once, and typically more than once.
- At some courts like in San Francisco, there might be attorneys available to assist people for free on the day of the hearing. Having an attorney can be very beneficial to your case, and the Judge will usually ask you if you have one and encourage you to find one. They will usually give you more time to find an attorney if you ask for it and will give you a new court date. You should keep in mind that this means that your process may take a little bit longer.

### *Definitions:*

- **Respondent** - The Immigration Court refers to an immigrant who has court proceedings as a 'respondent.'
- **Individual hearing/merits hearing** - You can think of this as the trial date for your asylum claim; this will often be your final court date.
- **EAD clock** - This refers to the 150 days that must pass before you can apply for a work permit, which is also known as an Employment Authorization Document or EAD. The clock starts on the day you file your asylum application. If you request a continuance, the court will stop the clock until your next court date, so the days between the date you request the continuance and your next hearing date do not count toward the 150 days waiting period.



### ***Courtroom procedure:***

- The courtroom will be full of people with the same hearing time as you. Some of them will have attorneys, and some of them won't.
- The courtroom clerk always calls represented individuals (people with attorneys) to speak to the Immigration Judge first. Then, the clerk calls the last 3 digits of the respondent's A-number and last name.
- The last 3 digits of your A-number are \_\_ \_\_ \_\_.
  - You can ask the courtroom clerk to "pass" you so you can go even later, if you want.
- Remember to stand when the Immigration Judge walks in.
- When the clerk calls your A-number and last name, walk up and sit at the table where DHS (the government's attorney) is not sitting.

### ***When you are asked to speak:***

- Immigration Judge will ask you to confirm your "best language" (e.g., Dari, Pashto).
  - **Tell the Immigration Judge:** "My best language is \_\_\_\_\_."
    - It could happen that you do not understand a specific interpreter or their dialect is different from yours. You have the right to have your court hearing in your language, and you should tell the Judge if you do not understand the interpreter.
- Then Immigration Judge will ask you if you are ready to move forward with your case.
  - **Tell the Immigration Judge:** "No, your honor. I need a continuance so that I can find an attorney to represent me in court."
- If the Immigration Judge says "Why should I give it to you? You already filed the asylum application, so it seems like you should have enough information to proceed."
  - **Tell the Immigration Judge:** "Your honor, I have tried very hard to find an attorney and I am currently waiting for a response from at least one organization. Because I have the right to an attorney in this process, I am asking the court to give me a continuance so I can find a good attorney to help me present my case to the court."
- Then the clerk will draft a notice for the new court date.
  - When asked to approach the bench, you can walk up to the clerk, who will hand you 2 copies of the notice.
  - **Hand one copy** to the DHS attorney sitting at the other table.
  - **Keep the other copy** for yourself, then you can leave the courtroom.