DETENTION STANDARDS IMPLEMENTATION INITIATIVE

Information for Volunteers

Volunteer attorneys have made the American Bar Association Detention Standards Implementation Initiative (DSII) a success since 2001 when the Detention Standards first went into effect. Since their inception, the Detention Standards have been expanded and redrafted as the 2008 Performance Based National Detention Standards (PBNDS), and revised again in 2011; however, these newest Standards have not been adopted at all detention facilities.

DSII has worked with over 120 volunteer delegations who have visited more than 70 different detention facilities across the United States. The ABA provides a detailed, two-hour training to delegation members via video or telephone conference and ongoing support to prepare for the facility visit. The ABA also provides a step-by-step training manual, which includes a summary of select Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Detention Standards, guideline questionnaires based on the Standards for meetings with facility staff and detainees, and a sample report. Delegations focus on the ICE Detention Standards relating to legal access including: Access to Legal Material, Group Presentations on Legal Rights, Visitation, Telephone Access, Correspondence, Detainee Transfers, and Grievance Procedures. Volunteer delegation members typically spend a total of fifteen to twenty hours to participate in the Initiative, including training and preparation, the detention facility visit, and report drafting. Delegation leaders should anticipate spending additional time to coordinate the delegation.

The delegation includes four to six members (attorneys, legal assistants, summer associates, and translators if needed). The facility visit is arranged with ICE at least two weeks in advance. The visit includes meetings with ICE officials and facility staff and interviews with detainees. The information gathered from these conversations and the delegation’s observations of the facility is included in the report on the facility’s implementation of the ICE Detention Standards. Volunteers can expect to spend approximately half a day at the facility, depending on staff and the number of detainees to be interviewed. Including travel time, the visit may extend to a full day.

Volunteers send their draft report to the ABA staff, who review and submit final reports to ICE’s Detention Management Division. The ABA has submitted approximately 96 reports to date, and meets with ICE quarterly to discuss the reports. Reports are not released by the ABA, but are shared with ICE directly.

The 2000 ICE Detention Standards are available at:

The 2011 ICE Performance Based National Detention Standards (PBNDS) are available at:

For more information, please contact Robert Lang, Staff Attorney of the Commission on Immigration at (202) 662-1008 or Robert.Lang@americanbar.org.