

Breakout Session B: Preserving Rights of DACA Recipients and Other Immigrants



Kelly Hill founded the Ohio Progressive Asian Women's Leadership (OPAWL), a grassroots AAPI community that focuses on women's empowerment, reproductive justice, immigrant rights, LGBTQ inclusion, and mental health advocacy. She has broad experience working with the AAPI community through her past work with Asian American Community Services, Ohio Asian American Health Coalition, and the National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum. She currently works as a program manager at Columbus Public Health and previously worked as a research analyst at the Tennessee Office of Research and Education Accountability. She received her Masters of Education from Vanderbilt University and Masters of Theological Studies from Boston University.



Dr. Emily Houh, the Gustavus Henry Wald Professor of the Law and Contracts, has been teaching contracts, commercial law, and critical race theory since 2003 at the University of Cincinnati College of Law, where she is a three-time recipient of the Goldman Prize for Teaching Excellence and also serves as co-director of the College's Center for Race, Gender, and Social Justice. A graduate of Brown University, she earned her JD from the University of Michigan Law School, where she was a founding member and article editor of the Michigan Journal of Race & Law. After law school, she clerked for a federal judge in Detroit, worked as a staff attorney with the Legal Assistance Foundation of Chicago in its Southside Neighborhood office, and was a commercial litigation associate at Miller, Canfield, Paddock & Stone, PLC, in Detroit. Much of Professor Houh's past and current scholarship focuses on the interplay between contract law and critical race theory. Her most recent research projects, with Cincinnati Law colleague Professor Kristin Kalsem, use community-based participatory action research methods to explore and address issues relating to both predatory lending practices and domestic violence and intimate partner abuse.



Thalita Ferreira Pontes is currently a DACA recipient. She was born in 1991 in Brazil. When she was just nine years old, her parents decided to move the family to the United States in pursuit of a better future. Thalita earned her Associates of Applied Science Degree in Leadership from Valor Christian College. She also earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Psychology from Ohio Christian University. She hopes to continue to pursue her education and attend law school. Currently, Thalita works as a legal assistant at Simakovsky Law, an immigration law firm in Columbus, Ohio. She is fluent in Portuguese, which also enables her to serve as a translator and interpreter, and a valuable asset for marketing and forming client relations. When not working, Thalita is an active volunteer member at her local church and is always ready to serve others. She also enjoys playing the drums or the guitar in bands, and creating short entertainment videos on YouTube.



Inna Simakovsky, Esq. emigrated from the former Soviet Union in 1976. She graduated from the University of Cincinnati in 1993 with a degree in International Studies and a JD from the Mortiz College of Law at OSU in 1998. From 2004 through 2007, Ms. Simakovsky supervised the largest non-profit immigration services provider in Columbus. She also started immigration programs at the ECDI in Columbus, Ohio and ASIA, Inc in Cleveland, Ohio. She is a past board member of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society and Catholic Legal Immigration Network, and is a member of the American Immigration Lawyers Association. Her immigration practice represents clients before immigration, the asylum office, and in immigration court.



Kimlee Suremee is the manager of Policy-Advocacy & Development at Asian Services In Action, Inc. Working nearly 5 years at ASIA, Inc., she knows first-hand that communities that work together change together. Her priorities focus on the civic engagement among AAPI and new American communities across Ohio. Through successful partnerships, she manages the ACE Network, the largest statewide civic engagement network focused on electoral and capacity building in the new American and immigrant community. She also has experience in media and communications, and fundraising and major gifts. Kimlee holds a degree in International European Affairs from Cleveland State University.



Melissa Gawelek, Esq. is an immigration attorney at Asian Services In Action, Inc. As a graduate student, she gained a unique "behind the scenes" look at the Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement; insight she now uses to advocate for her clients facing deportation. Attorney Gawelek enjoys giving back to the community by participating in pro bono events for individuals who cannot afford to hire attorneys. She is a member of the American Immigration Lawyers Association, the Akron Bar Association, Christian Legal Society, the Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association, the Ohio State Bar Association, and the West Shore Bar Association.