



## LIGHTHOUSE IMMIGRANT ADVOCATES

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### Applying for Asylum *pro se*

This packet is designed to guide you through the process of applying for asylum and withholding of removal *pro se* (without the representation of an attorney). Asylum can be complicated, but this packet will ensure that this process goes as smoothly as possible for you.

#### What is Asylum?

In general, you may be eligible for asylum if you have experienced or fear experiencing harm because:

- You belong to a particular **race**;
- You practice a particular **religion** or refuse to practice a particular religion;
- You are of a particular **nationality**;
- You have a particular **political opinion** or belong to a group (e.g., opposition party) and are being harmed for your activities, or the person or group who wants to harm you believes that you have a particular political opinion; or
- You are part of a particular **social group** and have a characteristic which you cannot change, or should not be required to change. This characteristic is socially distinct; recognizable. For example, your ethnicity, your gender, sexual orientation, your tribal or clan group, or your family.

Harm can be experienced in the form of threats, physical or psychological harm, or other problems that put you at risk in your country. The person or group seeking to harm you may be the government or someone the government is unable or unwilling to control.

There is a **one-year** filing deadline to apply for asylum. This means that USCIS must receive your asylum application within one year of your arrival in the United States. To calculate the one year deadline, start with your most recent date of arrival, add one year, then subtract one day. This is the date your application must be received by USCIS.

Example: For an arrival date of August 2, 2023, USCIS must receive your application **no later than** August 1, 2024.

**This fact sheet and packet are not intended as legal advice for your specific case. It is always advisable to consult with a licensed attorney to determine immigration benefit eligibility.**



## How To Apply For Asylum: Step-by-Step

**Step 1: Prepare the declaration.** The personal declaration is a letter written by you (the asylum applicant) explaining why you fear returning to your home country.

**Step 2: Fill out form I-589 *Application for Asylum and for Withholding of Removal*.** This is the government form that needs to be submitted to apply for asylum.

**Step 3: Collect evidence.** This could include country conditions, identification documents, and photos of the harm or mistreatment you experienced.

**Step 4: Submit the application.** Mailing your application to the appropriate office or submitting the form following the online directions precisely ensures the proper filing of your asylum application.

**Step 5: Wait for notices from USCIS or EOIR.** You will receive three notices: a receipt, a biometrics notice, and an interview notice.

**Step 6: Attend your asylum interview and wait for the decision.**

### THINGS TO REMEMBER

- One-year filing deadline: USCIS must receive your asylum application within one year of your arrival in the United States. Example: For an arrival date of August 2, 2023, USCIS must receive your application **no later than** August 1, 2024.
- Keep your documents safe: Make hard copies of your evidence and identity documents, and if possible, save them in a secure online location. If your phone breaks or is lost, you won't want to lose all your evidence.
- Keep your address updated with USCIS: This is **very** important to ensure that you will receive all mail from USCIS. If you move, file form AR-11 *Change of address* by mail or online at [www.uscis.gov/ar-11](http://www.uscis.gov/ar-11). Note: If you are in removal proceedings, you must also file an EOIR-33 with the court. This can be submitted by mail or online at [respondentaccess.eoir.justice.gov/en/forms/eoir33ic/](https://respondentaccess.eoir.justice.gov/en/forms/eoir33ic/). Copies of the AR-11 and E-33 have been included in this packet.
- Translations: Every non-English document must include a certified English translation. There is a list of resources at the end of this packet that may be able to assist in providing these certified translations.



## STEP 1: PREPARE THE DECLARATION

### What is the declaration?

Your declaration is a written document explaining what happened in your home country and why you fear returning. It should be handwritten on paper or typed and printed out. You must include your name, A-number, and signature at the bottom of each page. You may write this in your native language and include it in your application but you must also include an English translation.

### Sample Questions and Outline:

Begin your statement with **"I swear under penalty of perjury that the following is true and correct to the best of my knowledge."**

- **Background**
  - Provide basic information about who you are, where you are from, and details about your entrance to the United States. Also write about why you are afraid of returning to your home country. Are you in danger due to your religion, race, political opinion, or other characteristics? If so, please provide relevant details such as how long you've been practicing your religion or what social group you are a part of.
- **Past Persecution**
  - Did you suffer persecution or harm in the past? If so, write about each incident.
  - Include as many details as possible about events in the order they happened. Write about what happened and why, who was there, what was the response of authorities, and any information that could be important.
- **Well-Founded Fear of Future Persecution**
  - In this section, you can discuss why you fear persecution in the future. What do you fear would happen if you were to return to your home country? Be as specific as possible.
- **Relocation**
  - Explain why staying anywhere in your country was not a safe option for you.
- **Lack of Government Protection**
  - Explain in this section why you believe the government cannot or will not protect you from persecution. How has the government been a participant in your persecution?
- **Conclusion**
  - The end of your declaration should briefly answer why you should be granted asylum. Think about the information you provided earlier in the declaration and try to summarize it into one or two sentences that explain why you cannot return to your country of origin.

### Declaration writing tips:

1. **Headings can help organize and highlight key points.**
2. **Don't copy anyone else's words.**
3. **Keep it concise.**
4. **Don't include anything you won't remember at your interview!**



## **STEP 2: FILL OUT FORM I-589 *Application for Asylum and for Withholding of Removal.***

To apply for asylum, you must fill out Form I-589, which is called the *Application for Asylum and for Withholding of Removal*. You can obtain an I-589 from the USCIS website: <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-and-asylum/asylum>. There is a Spanish version of the form included for your reference, **but the English version must be the one that is submitted.**

### **Tips:**

- Read these instructions and the ones on the form very carefully before filling anything out.
- If you are unsure of a date, write “approx.” and then the date as accurately as possible.
- Try to leave as few boxes blank as possible unless they do not apply.
- If a question does not apply to you, you may write “N/A.”
- Fill out the form completely in English, you may have someone help you but that must be indicated in Parts D and E.

### **Part A.I**

Select the box at the top if you would like to apply for withholding of removal under the Convention Against Torture. This could protect you from being returned to your country of origin even if you are not granted asylum, though it cannot protect you from removal altogether as you may still be removed to a third country from which you do not fear persecution.

Your application may be rejected if you do not fill out the following questions in this section:

- Question 4 - Complete last name
- Question 8 - Complete address of residence in the U.S.
- Question 12 - Date of birth
- Question 13 - Country of birth

Only mark that you speak English fluently if you are comfortable speaking with immigration officials in English without an interpreter present.

Leave the boxes at the bottom of the first page blank - They are for use by asylum officers.

### **Part A.II**

If you are married and/or have children, you must complete the applicable questions. If you are married and/or have children and you do not provide information about them, your application may be rejected. Include all children regardless of age, marital status, or location but complete questions 14-21 about each child only if they currently reside in the United States.

### **Part A.III**

Note that the application asks about *every* school you have attended and for your address and employment history from the past 5 years.



**Part B**

Part B asks questions about your asylum claim and the fear you may feel about returning to your country of origin. Provide as many details as possible and be specific. Avoid generalizations and speak directly about your own experiences and fears.

You must select at least one box in response to question 1 and answer every question in this section. If you answer “yes” to anything, provide an explanation in the corresponding boxes. You may leave question 3b unanswered if your response to question 3a was “no.”

**Part C**

You must select either “yes” or “no” to every question in this section. If you select “yes” to any question, provide an explanation in the corresponding box.

**Part D**

As the applicant, you must sign the application in this section or it will be rejected. Follow the instructions for where and how to write your name.

**Part E**

If you answered YES to the question in Part D about a person other than a family member assisting you in completing this application, have that person fill out Part E.

Leave the box at the very bottom of the page completely blank.

**Part F**

This section is to be completed at your asylum interview, if you have one. Do not write anything in this section until then.

**Part G**

This section is to be completed at your removal hearing, if you have one. Do not write anything in this section until then.

**Supplement A**

This page is to be used if you have more than four children and need more space to complete your children's information. You may attach as many Supplement A's as necessary. If you do not need the additional space, you do not need to attach this page to your application.

**Supplement B**

The Supplement B form is to be used if you need more space in any other section of your application. You may attach as many Supplement B's as necessary. If you do not need additional space for any question, you do not need to attach this page to your application.



## STEP 3: COLLECT EVIDENCE

All evidence that you submit should be a photocopy of the document, not the original.

**Identification Documents:** Any type of identification document you may have no matter the country of issuance. This may include:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I-94                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Passport             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social security card      | <input type="checkbox"/> Birth certificate    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Work permit/EAD           | <input type="checkbox"/> Work ID badge        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Driver's license          | <input type="checkbox"/> Marriage certificate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> State ID card             | <input type="checkbox"/> Divorce certificate  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Country of origin ID card | <input type="checkbox"/> Diploma              |

**Supporting Evidence:** Any documentation of harm or threats. This may include:

- Any sort of written threat made towards you or your family
- Photos of physical harm
- Medical records if you sought care after experiencing harm
- Witness letters from individuals who witnessed the harm you experienced
- Newspaper articles

**Country Conditions Research:** Background information about the human rights situation in your country.

You may send in articles from magazines, newspapers, books, human rights reports, or any other documents which help explain the situation in your country and why a person in your situation would fear returning. Below is a short list of helpful websites where you can find information about your country, but there are many other places you can find helpful information:

- Department of State: <http://www.state.gov>
- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service: <http://uscis.gov>
- EOIR (Immigration Court and BIA): <http://www.usdoj.gov/eoir>
- United Nations High Commission for Refugees: <https://www.unhcr.org/>
- Human Rights Watch: <http://www.hrw.org>
- Amnesty International: <http://www.amnesty.org>

***Reminder: All evidence must be submitted in English or with a certified English translation.***



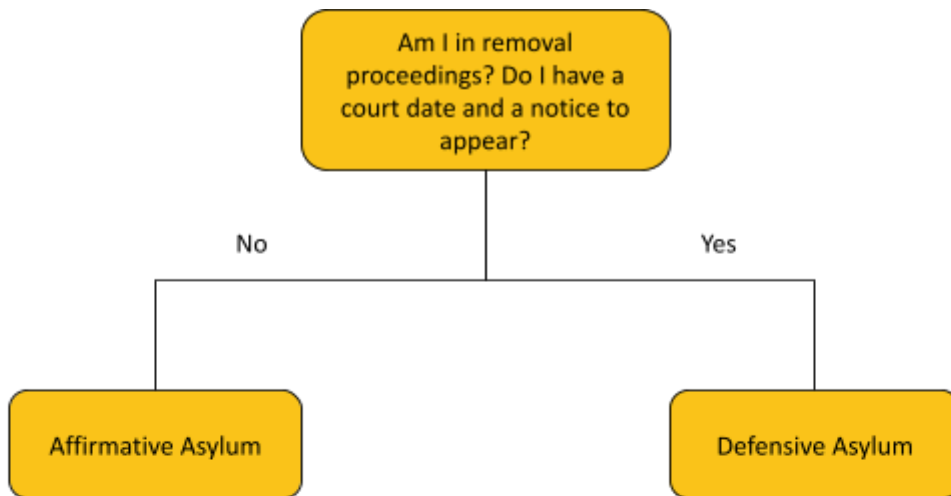
## STEP 4: SUBMIT THE APPLICATION

See the flowchart on page 9 to determine which filing method is best for you.

### Filing by Mail

If you choose to submit your application via mail, make sure to mail it to the appropriate office. This ensures the proper filing of your asylum application.

How to determine where to send your application:



**1. Send the original I-589 application to this address:**

If submitting by U.S. Postal Service (USPS):

USCIS  
Attn: I-589  
P.O. Box 6893  
Chicago, IL 60680

If submitting by FedEx or UPS:

USCIS  
Attn: I-589 (Box6893)  
131 S. Dearborn St., 3rd Floor  
Chicago, IL 60603-5517

**1. Send the original I-589 application to this address:**

Detroit Immigration Court  
P.V. McNamara Federal Building  
477 Michigan Avenue, Suite 440  
Detroit, MI 48226

**2. Send a copy of the entire application to this address:**

Office of the Principal Legal Advisor  
Rosa Parks Federal Building  
333 Mt. Elliott Street  
2nd Floor  
Detroit, MI 48207

**3. Send a copy of the *first 3 pages only* to this address:**

USCIS Nebraska Service Center  
Defensive Asylum Application with Immigration Court  
P.O. Box 87589  
Lincoln, NE 68501-7589

**Remember to always keep a copy for your own records!**



## Filing Online

If you are eligible and choose to file your asylum application online, there are a series of steps you must follow.

1. Create or log in to your online USCIS account
  - a. Make sure you use an email address that you have access to and will continue to have access to in the future
2. Select “File a Form Online”
3. Complete all sections of your form
  - a. The online form has all the same information as the paper form but some of it is in a different order or format. Carefully read all instructions as you go to ensure you are filling out each field correctly.
4. Upload evidence
  - a. Upload the documents listed in this section of the application and any other evidence that you feel are relevant to your asylum claim.
  - b. If you acquire more evidence after submitting the application that you believe could be important for the asylum officers reviewing your case to be aware of, you are able to provide additional information in the Documents tab of your account at any point before a decision has been reached about your case.
5. Review and digitally sign your form
  - a. Once your form has been completed, you will have the opportunity to review the information you entered to ensure all the information is correct. **You may also download a PDF of your application at this time to save for your own records.**
  - b. As soon as you are sure all the information included in your application is correct, digitally sign it by typing your full legal name in the space provided. Since there is no fee to file the I-589, you may then submit the completed form.
6. View notices
  - a. Upon the submission of your I-589, a receipt number and notice will be generated. You can find the receipt number on your account homepage, and the receipt notice under the Documents tab.
  - b. You may also be required to attend a biometrics appointment and eventually an interview. Once those appointments are scheduled, the corresponding notices will appear under the Documents tab as well.
  - c. Once a decision has been made on your case, you will be able to access the results and details of the decision through your online account.

It is important to regularly check your online account so that you can check on the status of your case as well as to ensure you do not miss any important notices such as Biometrics Notice, Interview Notice, or Request for Evidence.

The online account also gives you access to a secure inbox through which you can send your questions to an immigration officer and receive a response.



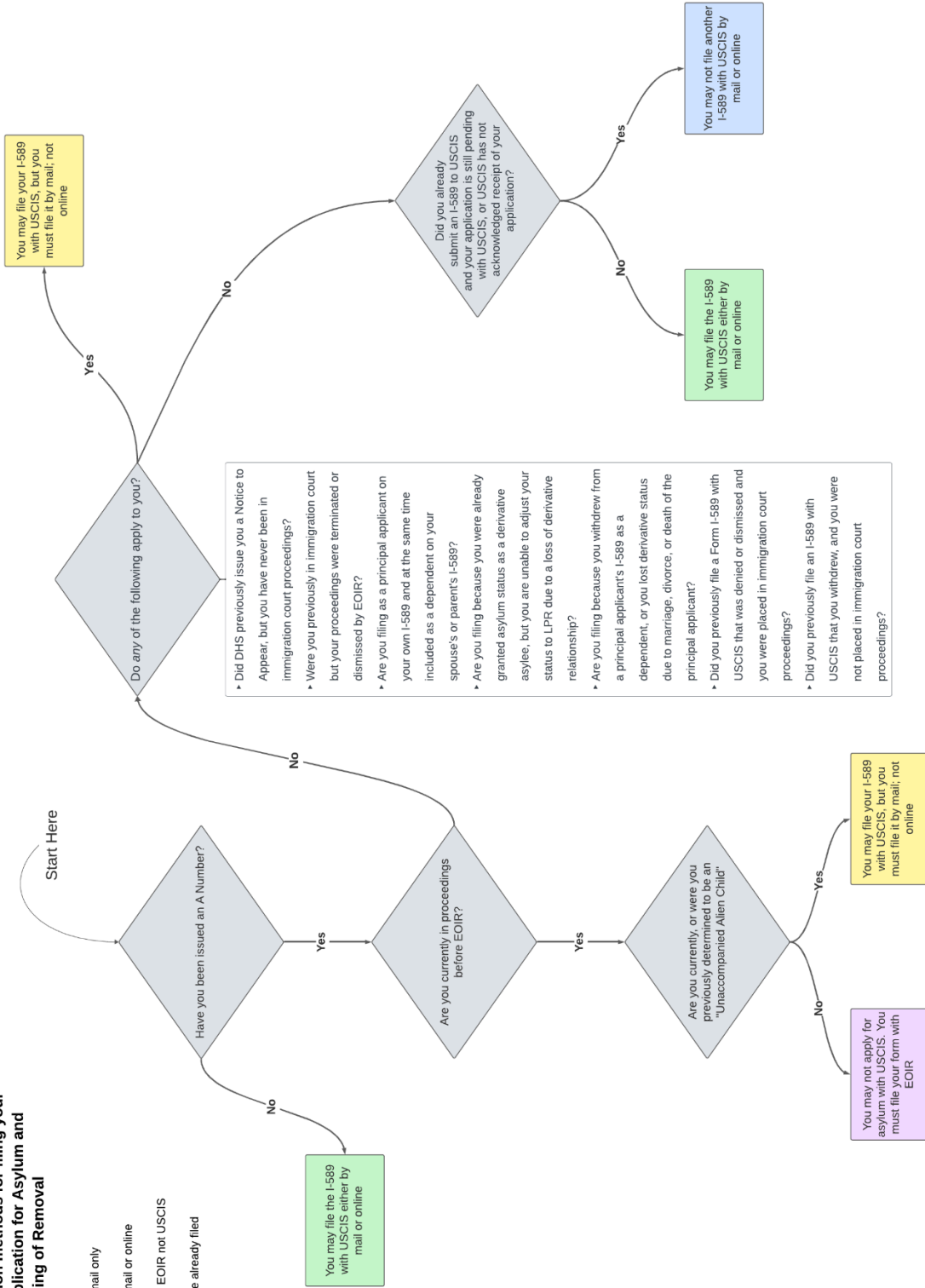




### Submission methods for filing your I-589 Application for Asylum and Withholding of Removal

#### Key

- File by mail only
- File by mail or online
- File with EOIR not USCIS
- You have already filed



All information on this flow chart has been taken directly from the USCIS Form I-589 Filing Instructions Tool found at <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/form-i-589-filing-instructions-tool>. This flowchart is not intended to be used as legal advice for your specific case. It is always advisable to consult with a licensed attorney to determine immigration benefit eligibility.

## STEP 5: WAIT FOR NOTICES FROM USCIS OR EOIR

You will receive three notices: a receipt notice, a biometrics notice, and an interview notice.

GOVERNMENT NOTICES ARRIVING IN THE MAIL		
<i>Document Type</i>	<i>When Notice Arrives</i>	<i>Significance</i>
Receipt Notice	Affirmative: ~3 months after submitting Defensive: ~5 months after submitting	Notice showing receipt of your application; make sure to check your information is all correct on the notice. <b>Your receipt notice is important, so do not lose it!</b>
Biometrics Appointment Notice	Affirmative: ~4 months after submitting Defensive: ~6 months after submitting	Notice setting an appointment to take your fingerprints and photo in order to conduct a background check, or to inform you that an appointment is not necessary.
Interview Notice ( <i>affirmative asylum</i> )	Varies, the wait time may be longer than a year	Notice scheduling an interview. The date, time, and location of the interview will be on the notice.
Hearing Notice ( <i>defensive asylum</i> )	Varies, the wait time may be longer than a year	Notice scheduling a hearing. The date, time, and location of the hearing will be on the notice.

### While you wait, apply for your work permit.

You *may* be eligible to apply for your work permit 150 days after submitting your asylum application.

Call LIA at (616) 298-8984 to schedule an appointment.

### Keep your address updated with USCIS

This is **very** important to ensure that you will receive all mail from USCIS. If you move, file form AR-11 *Change of address* by mail or online at [www.uscis.gov/ar-11](http://www.uscis.gov/ar-11).

Note: If you are in removal proceedings, you must also file an EOIR-33 with the court. This can be submitted by mail or online at [respondentaccess.eoir.justice.gov/en/forms/eoir33ic/](https://respondentaccess.eoir.justice.gov/en/forms/eoir33ic/). Copies of the AR-11 and E-33 have been included in this packet.



## STEP 6: ATTEND YOUR ASYLUM INTERVIEW OR IMMIGRATION COURT HEARING AND WAIT FOR THE DECISION.

Eventually, you will receive a notice of an asylum interview or an immigration court hearing. **It is very important to attend these appointments.** Lack of attendance may result in denial of your asylum application and in some cases, an order of removal from the United States.

### What to bring to your asylum interview/immigration court hearing:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Passports            | <input type="checkbox"/> Any documents you submitted with your I-589 and their certified translations (if applicable) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Travel documents     | <input type="checkbox"/> A copy of your I-589 application   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Photo identification |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I-94                 |   |

### Interpretation at the interview/hearing:

In immigration court, an interpreter will be provided for you. If you have an asylum interview and you are not comfortable completing the interview in English, you must bring your own interpreter.

Your interpreter must be:

- At least 18 years old
- Fluent in both English and your preferred language

Your interpreter must NOT be:

- A witness testifying on your behalf
- A representative or employee of the government from which you are seeking asylum
- Another individual with a pending asylum application who has not yet been interviewed

Do not memorize your declaration or written answers in the I-589, but do familiarize yourself again before the interview with what you wrote. The Asylum Officer will ask you questions based on the information in your declaration and asylum application.

After your interview is completed, the Asylum Officer will make a determination about your case. You could receive your decision as soon as two weeks after the interview but wait times may vary depending on the case. *The length of your wait time is not an indication of an approval or a denial.*

**This fact sheet and packet are not intended as legal advice. It is always advisable to consult with a licensed attorney to determine immigration benefit eligibility.**



## Additional Resources

### **Bethany Christian Services**

660 Burton St SE Grand Rapids, MI 49507

(616) 224-7550

<https://bethany.org/>

Languages: English, interpretation services available

Services: Resettlement services

### **Community Action House**

739 Paw Paw Dr Holland MI 49423

(616) 392-2368

<https://www.communityactionhouse.org/>

Languages: English

Services: Food assistance

### **Community Food Club**

1100 S Division Ave Ste E Grand Rapids MI 49507

(616) 288-5550

<https://communityfoodclubgr.org/>

Languages: English; Spanish

Services: Food assistance

### **Hispanic Center of West Michigan**

1204 Cesar E Chavez Ave SW Grand Rapids MI 49503

(616) 742-0200

<https://hispanic-center.org/>

Languages: English; Spanish

Services: Document translation; interpretation; employment assistance

### **Immigrant Assistance Center of West Michigan**

4489 Byron Center Ave SW Wyoming MI 49519

(616) 317-7063

<https://www.iacwmi.org/>

Languages: English; Spanish

Services: Immigration legal aid; document translation

### **Immigration Law and Justice Michigan**

207 Fulton St E Grand Rapids MI 49503

(616) 320-2734

<https://www.iljmi.org/>

Languages: Arabic; Burmese; Cantonese; English; French; German; Kinyarwanda;

Portuguese; Russian; Spanish; Tigrinya

Services: Immigration legal aid; document translation

### **Latin Americans United for Progress**

430 W 17th St #31 Holland MI 49423

(616) 888-7225

<https://laup.org/>

Languages: English; Spanish

Services: Document translation; English classes

### **Lighthouse Immigrant Advocates**

412 W 24th St Holland MI 49424

(616) 298-8984

<https://lia-michigan.org/>

Languages: English; Spanish

Services: Immigration legal aid; document translation

### **Michigan Immigrant Resource Center**

1500 E Beltline SE Ste 300 Grand Rapids MI 49506

(616) 427-4080

<https://michiganimmigrant.org/>

Languages: English; Spanish

Services: Immigration legal aid

### **Office of Global Michigan**

105 W Allegan St Lansing MI 48933

(517) 335-1181

<https://www.michigan.gov/ogm>

Languages: English

Services: Housing assistance; refugee services; connections to various other resources

