

The Synod of the Northeast overtures the 227th General Assembly (2026) to:

Direct the Unified Agency to reinstate the position of Staff Attorney for Immigration as a full-time role, filled by a licensed immigration attorney, and to further direct the Unified Agency to:

- (1) provide the full budget required for this position, including but not limited to salary and benefits;
- (2) provide additional programmatic funds necessary to carry out this ministry on behalf of the whole denomination; and
- (3) ensure the continuity of this position, regardless of future reorganizations, and require that the position be held by an attorney with demonstrated specialization and expertise in federal immigration law and religious-based employment.

Rationale

In recent months, mid-councils across the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) have experienced a disruption in access to coordinated immigration legal support for employment-based matters involving teaching elders and candidates for ministry. During this period, a vital denominational function that previously supported mid-councils throughout the Church has remained unfilled, with limited clarity regarding how this work will be sustained. Communication regarding the handling of current and future employment-based immigration cases has been inconsistent, creating uncertainty across the denomination. Taken together, these conditions present a matter requiring immediate institutional attention.

Consequently, many mid-councils have been compelled to retain legal counsel independently to meet immediate needs. While undertaken in good faith, these decentralized responses have produced uneven practices, increased administrative burden, and heightened confusion. Within the current legal climate of the United States, such fragmentation increases the risk of harm to immigrant pastors and candidates for ministry and diminishes the Church's capacity to provide reliable accompaniment. These challenges also affect immigrant congregations, Committees on Preparation for Ministry, Committees on Ministry, and other interconnected ministries that depend upon accurate and timely legal guidance.

Despite requests for clarification and shared discernment, there has not yet been a clear articulation of how this work will be supported moving forward, nor a clear affirmation that this function will continue at the national church level for the benefit of the whole denomination. As a result, mid-councils are struggling to sustain this essential work independently. Experience over the past year demonstrates that decentralized solutions are insufficient to meet the scope, complexity, and risk inherent in federal immigration processes, resulting in a patchwork of approaches across the Church.

The United States immigration process related to religious-based employment is complex, highly technical, and subject to frequent change. It is neither reasonable nor feasible for individual mid-councils to remain fully current on these developments while also providing accurate legal guidance to congregations, ministers, and candidates for ministry. These matters regularly cross presbytery boundaries, as calls often do, further underscoring the need for coordinated expertise. At the same time, mid-council leaders lack consistent access to the training, education, and information required to navigate this evolving legal landscape effectively.

The need for accurate, timely, compassionate, and accessible immigration legal support for the whole Church has intensified over the past year, even as the risks associated with missteps in federal immigration processes have increased significantly. While it has been suggested that changes in visa availability may reduce the need for such services, our experience within the Synod suggests otherwise. Local presbyteries have been hindered in their ability to resource and advocate for immigrant communities, congregations, ministers, and candidates under care.

There is an urgent need for the General Assembly to address this matter with clarity and resolve, affirming care for immigrant congregations, ministers, and candidates for ministry, and support for the mid-councils who accompany them. This commitment is foundational to our biblical and theological tradition, which consistently calls God's people to honor and protect the "foreigner and stranger among us" (Genesis 23:4; Deuteronomy 10:19, 27:19; Leviticus 19:34; 1 Chronicles 16:19–22; Job 29:15–17; Jeremiah 7:5–7; Ezekiel 47:22; Zechariah 7:9–10; Matthew 5:43–48, 25:35–40; Luke 10:27; Acts 10:27, 34; Romans 12:13, 13:8–10; Colossians 3:11; Hebrews 13:1–3; 3 John 1:5; Revelation 21:3). Previous actions of the General Assembly, including Transformation of Churches and Society Through Encounters with New Neighbors (1999) and the Resolution Calling for a Comprehensive Legalization Program for Immigrants Living and Working in the United States (2004), further affirm this witness.

This overture is offered in a spirit of shared responsibility and collaboration, inviting the General Assembly to speak with a clear and unified voice and to exercise institutional leadership in restoring this vital service for the good of the whole denomination.