

**national**  
**IMMIGRATION**  
**project**  
of the national lawyers guild



**Joint Press Release: Penn State's Center for Immigrants' Rights White Paper Responds to Justice Department's Report on Hiring Practices of Immigration Judges**

University Park, PA (October 1, 2009) — The Center for Immigrants' Rights at Penn State University, The Dickinson School of Law and the National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild (NIPNLG) released today a white paper titled "[Playing Politics at the Bench: A White Paper on the Justice Department's Investigation into the Hiring Practices of Immigration Judges.](#)"

A 2008 investigation by the Justice Department's Inspector General revealed that the Department of Justice illegally hired dozens of immigration judges from 2004 through 2007. Instead of applying merit-based criteria, key Department of Justice personnel installed immigration judges based on political criteria. Co-authored by Penn State Law students, Christina Heischmidt and Alham Usman, the white paper summarizes the investigation and offers recommendations to improve the nation's crippled immigration court system.

"The immigration court system has long suffered resource challenges, allegations of bias, deterioration in the quality of decisionmaking at the immigration court and Board of Immigration Appeals, and a lack of independence," said Shoba Sivaprasad Wadhia, director of Penn State Law's Center for Immigrants' Rights.

"[Playing Politics at the Bench](#)" documents how the illegal hiring process aggravated an already broken system," said Paromita Shah, associate director of the National Immigration Project.

"The Center for Immigrants' Rights is a rare and challenging opportunity for law students to shape immigration policy. For me, producing a work-product targeted towards fundamental policy change made the clinical experience one of my best in law school," said co-author Usman.

"[Playing Politics at the Bench](#)" recommends that every immigration judge employed through the illegal hiring process reapply through a merit-based hiring process, and that future immigration judge vacancies be filled in accordance with the legal hiring process including minimum qualifications in immigration law. The white paper also makes recommendations to improve resources, training and fairness in the immigration court system.

Media Contact:  
Penn State Law  
Pamela Knowlton  
(717) 240-5212

National Immigration Project of the NLG  
Paromita Shah  
(202) 271-2286