

**PRESENTED AT**

46<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference on Immigration and Nationality Law and  
Fundamentals

September 28, 29-30, 2022  
Austin, Texas

**The Devil's Dictionary: Common Immigration  
Acronyms**

**Michelle Saenz-Rodriguez  
Jacqueline L. Watson**

Michelle Saenz-Rodriguez  
Saenz-Rodriguez & Associates, P.C.  
Dallas, Texas  
Michelle@sralawonline.com  
214.637.5700

Jacqueline L. Watson  
Walker-Gates Vela, PLLC  
Austin, Texas  
jacquelinew@walkergatesvela.com

# **The Devil's Dictionary: Common Immigration Acronyms**

**By**

**Michelle Saenz-Rodriguez**

**Jacqueline L. Watson**

## **Preface**

Immigration lawyers speak in a language confounding to normal people. In particular, the use of acronyms as actual words drives the uninitiated mad. A good grasp of immigration law, however, requires a familiarity with this new language. Much like the original *The Devil's Dictionary*,<sup>1</sup> many definitions range from the counterintuitive to the ironic. The authors of this list have a combined immigration law experience of over 50 years; even then, neither would pretend that this list is complete. It is nonetheless a pretty thorough list of basic terminology with quite a bit of history. Enjoy.

AAO (Administrative Appeals Office) - The AAO considers appeals of certain decisions made by USCIS. The AAO is itself an office of USCIS. (APPEAL, *v.t.*, In law, to put the dice into the box for another throw)

AFM (Adjudicator's Field Manual) - Prior to the USCIS Policy Manual, the AFM contained the internal policies and procedures used by USCIS for the purpose of adjudication of immigration benefits. Parts of the AFM live on the USCIS Policy Manual.

AILA (American Immigration Lawyers Association) - The largest and oldest professional association immigration lawyers. AILA promotes local chapter membership, inarguably the best chapter being the Texas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico Chapter.

AOS (Adjustment of Status) - AOS is the process by which a noncitizen applies for LPR status within the U.S. AOS can sometimes refer to "Affidavit of Support," but it is far more commonly used when referring to adjustment.

APA (Administrative Procedures Act) - The APA is the legal mechanism by which federal agencies develop and issue regulations to carry out federal statutes. It also allows for complaints to be filed in a U.S. District Court by persons adversely affected by actions of a federal agency, including actions against DHS's administration of federal immigration law.

---

<sup>1</sup> The original *The Devil's Dictionary* is a book by American author Ambrose Bierce that started as a weekly article beginning in 1881. Originally called *The Cynic's Word Book*, it is an often-humorous take on words in everyday usage in the form of a dictionary. Fair warning: if interested in reading the piece, know that it contains unacceptable language that was commonly used in 1881 to refer to women and minorities. There are many legal and political terms, however, that are absolutely brutal and still have relevance in our modern society. See, for example, the definition for appeal, above.

ASC (Application Support Center) - The ASC is the office where applicants for benefits before USCIS or EOIR undergo biometric processing (fingerprints and photographs).

BALCA (Board of Alien Labor Certification Appeals) - BALCA considers appeals of denials of PERM labor certifications and it is an office of DOL. It is also high time to take out the unfortunate use of the word "alien" from the title of this office.

BCC (Border Crossing Card) - A BCC is only available to citizens of Mexico and is a card that permits the bearer to remain in the U.S. for up to 72 hours as well as restricts the distance the bearer may travel from the border. Colloquially referred to as "visa laser," it may also be used as a regular B1/B2 visa when presented as such and with a request for an I-94.

BIA (Board of Immigration Appeals) - The BIA considers appeals of decisions made by IJs in removal proceedings, as well as disciplinary decisions against attorneys practicing in immigration courts and appeals of denials of I-130 family-based petitions. There are currently 23 members on the BIA, but rarely do more than between one and three members ever decide a single case. The BIA is an office of EOIR, under the DOJ.

CAA (Cuban Adjustment Act) – Established 56 years ago in an attempt to destabilize the Castro Regime (we all see how well that worked), it provided lawful permanent resident status to Cuban natives and citizens who had been physically present in the United States for at least one year. With a few changes over the years, the law remains on the books today.

CAT (Convention Against Torture) - CAT is a UN treaty under which its signatories agree not to remove any person to a country in which that person would be in danger of being tortured by the government of that country or by entities which that government is unable or unwilling to control. "CAT" is also used to refer to two forms of relief under the treaty: withholding of removal and deferral of removal.

CBP (Customs and Border Protection) - CBP is under DHS and is the agency responsible for policing the borders and POEs. Here's what they are supposed to do: **Counter Terrorism, Combat Transnational Crime, Secure the Border, Facilitate Lawful Trade and Protect Revenue and Protect Lawful Travel.** We mostly know them as the mean guys at the airport who may or may not let you into the US. We also know them as the mean guys at the checkpoint who look at you suspiciously and make you nervous even if you were born in the USA. They are also the mean guys who might find that bottle of non-duty-free tequila in your luggage.

CCA (Child Citizenship Act) - A bright spot in immigration law, the CCA confers instant citizenship by operation of law on certain noncitizen children of USCs.

CDC (Center for Disease Control) - The CDC sets many of the rules regarding the health-related grounds of inadmissibility. It's also the agency that made Dr. Fauci the icon that he is today.

Find the full text of this and thousands of other resources from leading experts in dozens of legal practice areas in the [UT Law CLE eLibrary \(utcle.org/elibrary\)](https://utcle.org/elibrary)

## Title search: The Devil's Dictionary: Basic Immigration Terminology

Also available as part of the eCourse

[2022 Fundamentals of Immigration and Nationality Law eConference](#)

First appeared as part of the conference materials for the  
2022 Fundamentals of Immigration and Nationality Law session  
"The Devil's Dictionary: Basic Immigration Terminology"