



**County of Los Angeles
Department of Children and Family Services
Special Immigrant Status (SIS) Unit**



- The Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), Special Immigrant Status (SIS) Unit, is dedicated, with the collaboration of the Department of Homeland Security U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), community-based immigration agencies and pro bono private attorneys, to providing a full range of specialized immigration legal services to undocumented children and their families as well as former dependent children who meet criteria for immigration relief under Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), U.S. Citizenship/Naturalization, U-Visa (victims of criminal activity), VAWA (Violence Against Women Act), T- Visa (Victims of Human Trafficking), Asylum (seeking protection from persecution due to race, religion, political opinion or membership of a social group), and others.
- The SIS Unit is a specialized program part of the DCFS Bureau of Specialized Response Services. It provides countywide services to all the Department's nineteen community-based offices, including Adoptions.
- The SIS Unit's main focus of the services provided to undocumented dependent children is identifying and processing Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) for eligible children.
 1. Eligible children must be current dependents of the Juvenile Court;
 2. whose reunification with one or both of the minor's parents is not viable due to abuse, neglect, or abandonment;
 3. subjected to legal proceedings and findings that it is not in the child's best interest to be return to his/her country of nationality;
 4. child must be unmarried and under the age of 21.
- The SIS Unit handles the entire SIJS process from beginning to end until children are granted lawful permanent resident status.
- Additionally, the SIS Unit identifies and assists, in collaboration with immigration community partners (mainly the VAWA/U Visa Network), possible beneficiaries of:
 1. U-Visas: undocumented immigrants (adults or children) who are victims of violent crimes such as domestic violence, rape, severe physical assault, etc. who are willing to cooperate with law enforcement and DCFS in the investigation and prosecution of the crime
 2. T-Visas: undocumented immigrant (adults or children) submitted to forced prostitution or forced labor
 3. VAWA: undocumented domestic violence victim (and her children) legally married to a US citizen or legal resident perpetrator
 4. U Visa Certifications: verifications for USCIS of victim's collaboration with DCFS in the investigation and possible prosecution of perpetrator(s) of a qualifying crime, for U Visa application purposes.
- Undocumented dependent children and their families who may qualify for immigration relief, other than SIJS, are referred by the SIS Unit to nonprofit immigration community agencies and some private organizations on pro bono basis.
- The Department of Children and Family Services has been providing immigration services to undocumented children and families since 1987 thanks to its strong advocacy role.
- In 1987, the Department established the Amnesty Unit with the passing of the Immigration and Reform Act of 1986 and began its operation by completing 400 applications for legal resident status on behalf of undocumented children.
- Then the Department took an active role in successfully lobbying for the passing of Section 101 of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1990.

- When Special immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) became law in 1990, on August 1991, the Special Immigrant Status (SIS) Unit was formed.
- With the establishment of the SIS Unit, the Department also began a professional relationship with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services that has continued to grow over the years.
- To this date, over 3000 lawful permanent residence status applications have been approved changing the lives of dependent children permanently.
- In addition, the SIS Unit has completed over 1000 U Visa Certifications for victims of violent crimes investigated by DCFS, over 400 replacement/renewal permanent residence cards, and close to 150 U.S. citizenship/naturalizations.
- SIS Unit members are authorized representatives of dependent undocumented immigrant children recognized by USCIS as such, and secondary case-carrying DCFS workers who are required to use independent judgment, having knowledge of legal terminology, mastering DCFS and USCIS policies and procedures and understanding various federal forms and documents and their processing.
- Dependency Court orders usually include referring undocumented dependent children to the DCFS SIS Unit to be assessed for possible immigration relief and to identify other issues of concern such as child being in Removal Proceedings or lacking identifying documents from country of origin, or ORR records.
- As authorized representatives, the SIS Unit represents undocumented dependent children and non-minor dependent children during their USCIS interviews for their adjustment of status (U.S. lawful permanent resident status) as well as appearing during some children's Removal Proceeding at the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR).
- In addition to SIJS filings, U-Visa referrals and U Visa Certifications, the SIS Unit is also responsible for the filing of replacement of lost or stolen lawful permanent resident cards for dependent children and prior dependent, and U.S. Citizenship/Naturalization process for eligible young adults and dependent children who have been adopted out by at least one U.S. parent through DCFS.
- SIS Unit workers work closely with the various Consulates in Los Angeles and other cities throughout the United States to secure birth records, passports, and Consular identification cards.
- SIS Unit workers assist certain children who are subjected to Removal Proceedings to obtain immigration representation for Immigration Court from pro-bono attorneys from the local community.
- The SIS Unit workers provide support to the Superior Court of California of Los Angeles Juvenile Division at Edelman's Children's Court by assuming the responsibility of releasing some redacted DCFS records to clients who petition them for immigration purposes. SIS Unit members search, review, and redact these records and submit them to the Office of County Counsel for approval, prior to releasing them to clients, following DCFS policy on confidentiality.



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Special Immigrant Status (SIS) Unit and Superior Court of California Los Angeles.

- Edmund D. Edelman Children's Court is a Los Angeles County Superior Court in Monterey Park, California, United States in charge of handling all of the juvenile dependency cases in Los Angeles County.
- Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) investigate referrals of child abuse and neglect in Los Angeles County. Largest child welfare agency in the country; 7700 budgeted positions; almost 4000 Children's Social Workers (CSW) and almost 800 Supervising Children's Social Workers (SCSWs); 19,000 children in foster care; half of them living with relatives; partner with 47 Law Enforcement Agencies.
- The DCFS Child Protection Hotline 1800-540-4000 operates 24/7, including all Holidays; 218,000 calls received in 2016; 800-1000 calls per weekday; 250 calls per weekend day. Over 30% of calls result in-person response; 70% of callers are mandated reporters.
- If a child has been taken into protective custody as a result of abuse or neglect allegations, the Department must file a petition against parents or guardians within 48 judicial hours with Dependency Court. The petition initiates dependency court hearings, identifies the children and parents involved with the case, and describes the allegations of abuse or neglect against the children.
- Detention Hearing is held at end of 72 hours; based on DCFS report, judge rules regarding evidence for continued detention of minor; minor is either released or detained, pending Jurisdictional Hearing.
- If minor is detained a dependency investigation begins; a report must send to court addressing family history/dynamics, continued risk to minor, recommendations for placement, and reunification plan.
- Jurisdictional Hearing is usually held not longer than 15 judicial days following the Detention Hearing; based on a DCFS report, judge rules regarding evidence for dependency; minor is either released or adjudicated a dependent.
- If minor adjudicated a dependent, a Disposition Hearing is held immediately following Jurisdictional Hearing; based on court report, judge rules regarding placement of minor and specific court orders for reunification.
- If family reunification is not viable for a child with one or both of the parents, based on Judicial Reviews every 6 months, the court will determine a permanent plan for the child. If adoption or legal guardianship are not feasible, the child may remain in the Dependency system after age 18 as a non-minor dependent under AB 12.
- The majority of immigrant undocumented dependent children taken into protective custody by DCFS are children who came in to the United States with their parents when they were younger. The SIS Unit process about 130 of these children per year. Most of them qualify for SIJS or/and some other forms of immigration relief.
 1. A few of these children have been ordered removed by EOIR when their parents were ordered removed. The children are unaware of these proceedings and orders when they come to the attention of DCFS.
 2. The DCFS SIS Unit completes the filing of their SIJS application with USCIS and finds out of these old removal orders when USCIS rejects the I-485 petition.
 3. It is hard to find pro bono legal representation for these children.

- A small number of children taken into protective custody are Unaccompanied children who have been abused or neglected by their sponsors. The DCFS SIS Unit assesses about 20 of these cases per year.
 1. Some of these children have already attorneys appointed to represent them prior to coming to DCFS attention. Parents or guardians may have hired private attorneys and end up been unable to pay for their services. Children experience a gap in services and may risk been ordered removed in absentia.
 2. Attorneys may or may not be aware of the SIS Unit and the dependency court orders to file SIJS. Conflict emerges in these cases delaying the immigration relief efforts on behalf of the children.
 3. Dependency Court takes longer to adjudicate Unaccompanied minors as dependents because of its efforts to locate absent parents and to provide reasonable efforts for family reunification.
 4. A few judges in Dependency Court will not sign one-parent SIJS predicate orders. The SIS Unit would appeal these cases with the help of County Counsel, would assess for an alternative immigration relief, or will wait for a permanency order when appropriate.
 5. Many judges who are unfamiliar with EOIR proceedings are waiting for a disposition order from EOIR before they proceed to adjudicate an Unaccompanied minor a dependent. Attorney representing a child in EOIR may be waiting for a Dependency Court disposition order.
 6. Children detained from a sponsor by DCFS many times would withhold ORR documents or birth certificates in retaliation for the protective custody order.
 7. It is difficult to obtain any documentation from ORR in a timely manner.

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