



*The Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL) supports the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) as it secures the nation while preserving individual liberty, fairness, and equality under the law.*



### DHS Recognizes 350 Employees at Secretary’s Awards Ceremony in Washington, DC

On October 7, DHS held an awards ceremony hosted at its Headquarters in Washington, DC where 350 employees received a Secretary’s Award in recognition of their outstanding contributions to the Department’s mission.

“Every single day, with great determination, integrity, and skill, the 268,000 men and women of the Department of Homeland Security ensure the safety and security of the American people,” **said Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro N. Mayorkas.** “Thanks to these extraordinary public servants, our shores, harbors, skies, cyberspace, and borders are protected; fentanyl and other deadly drugs are prevented from entering our country; communities are able to recover and rebuild after a natural disaster; the scourges of human trafficking, forced labor, and online exploitation are mitigated; and so much more. The individuals we recognize today with our Department’s highest honor, the Secretary’s Award, reflect the very best of DHS – and in their selfless dedication to mission, the very best of public service.”

The DHS Secretary’s Awards are an annual program that recognizes the extraordinary individual and collective achievements of the workforce. The 350 awardees recognized at the ceremony represent the **Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties**, the Office of the General Counsel, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services.

This year’s award recipients developed and issued policy and procedures associated with a whole-scale transition to a new pay system for TSA; launched a series of coordinated and collaborative initiatives, operations and investigations targeting Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) and national security threats operating and transiting through the Darien Gap region; arrested over 8,000 human smugglers, produced over 5,000 intelligence reports, and seized over \$38M USD in real property; ensured over 2,300 vital alerts and warnings were provided to owners and operators of critical infrastructure to protect against cyberattacks; among many other achievements.

This year, DHS is holding nine Secretary’s Awards ceremonies across the country, honoring over 1,700 employees, the most annual awardees ever.

CRCL staff received awards in the following categories: Exceptional Service, Meritorious Service, Leadership Excellence, Innovation, Team Excellence, and Champion of Equity. For a full listing of awardees, visit: [2024 Secretary's Awards](#).

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## **DHS Announces \$210 Million of Additional Funds to Protect Faith-Based Institutions and Nonprofit Organizations Against Targeted Attacks**

DHS has announced that it will distribute \$210 million in Nonprofit Security Grant Program (NSGP) funds through the Federal Emergency Management Agency as the second tranche of additional funding that the Biden-Harris Administration secured to protect faith-based institutions and nonprofit organizations against targeted attacks. This funding will be made available in a Notice of Funding Opportunity to be published in late October.

The \$210 million in additional funds are a portion of the \$390 million that were included in the fiscal year 2024 National Security Supplemental, a key priority of the Administration as it continues to intensify its efforts to combat the dramatic increase in hate crimes and other forms of targeted violence against faith-based institutions and nonprofit organizations. The first tranche was [made available in June 2024](#). In total for fiscal year 2024, the Administration has secured \$664 million for the NSGP, more than double last year's \$305 million appropriation. The Notice of Funding Opportunity will be published in late October. For more information visit [FEMA.gov/Grants](https://www.fema.gov/grants).

## **CRCL Officer Speaks to Asian Pacific American Bar Association of Pennsylvania**

This month, CRCL Officer Shoba Sivaprasad Wadhia gave the keynote address at the Asian Pacific American Bar Association of Pennsylvania's Annual Fall Gala. She spoke on her experiences as an attorney of Asian American descent, and how that unique perspective impacts her work in leading the integration of civil rights and civil liberties protections and consideration across DHS.

Officer Sivaprasad Wadhia shared how she worked on legislation following the 9/11 attacks that helped to create the Department, along with policies developed to respond to real-world impacts for all Americans, including Asian American Native Hawaiian Pacific Islanders (AANHPI) and other diverse communities. She further spoke to how CRCL's scope of work covers a range of ensuring the Department's compliance with international human rights laws, working to improve condition of detention, and ensuring that faith-based and diverse communities are aware of DHS grants and resources that helps them to recover from natural disasters and protects against targeted violence.

Officer Wadhia also acknowledged that more remains to be done to fully realize the CRCL mission for DHS and its customers. To that end, CRCL is leading efforts to advance protections for survivors of human trafficking and gender-based violence, prioritize access to humanitarian protection through the DHS Case Management Pilot Program, providing meaningful language access for LEP individuals, and ensuring the safety and security of college campuses across the country, among several other initiatives.

## **CRCL Visits Maryland Test Facility**

Earlier this month, CRCL Officer Shoba Sivaprasad Wadhia visited the Maryland Test Facility (MdTF) to continue CRCL's partnership with the DHS Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) on testing and evaluation of biometric technologies. The MdTF supports multiple projects for DHS S&T's Biometrics and Identity Technology Center, including projects that help inform CBP, TSA, and external agencies' evaluations and implementation of solutions in operational environments. CRCL received a briefing on the science of testing biometric technology, how artificial intelligence is leveraged in the design of these technologies, including face recognition and face capture, the volunteer recruitment process, and an overview of MdTF's recent data and published studies. CRCL also toured the facility, observing several testing areas designed to assess face recognition and face capture technology. CRCL looks forward to continued engagement with S&T and the MdTF.



## **DHS 2025 Homeland Threat Assessment**

The Department's [2025 Homeland Threat Assessment](#) (HTA) is designed to inform both the public and the Department's partners of the threats to public safety and security, in order to assist federal, state, and local partners in preparing, preventing, and responding to an ever-evolving threat environment. The HTA describes a threat environment that is expected to "remain high" over the coming year.

"The Homeland Security Assessment provides an important overview of the dynamic and evolving threat landscape, illustrating just how varied and challenging the threats we confront are," **said Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro N. Mayorkas**. "It is because of the remarkable DHS workforce, and our close collaboration with our federal, state, local, tribal, territorial, and private sector partners, that we are able to meet the challenges and keep the American people safe and secure." Read more on the HTA at: [DHS' 2025 Homeland Threat Assessment Indicates the Threat of Domestic and Foreign Terrorism in the Homeland Remains High](#).

### **CRCL Hosts a Series of Engagements with New York City Stakeholders**

This month, CRCL hosted a series of engagements with a broad range of stakeholders in New York City to discuss language access, legal services, and resources to prevent targeted violence. These events included:

- CRCL Officer Shoba Sivaprasad Wadhia and team led a meeting with more than 30 local community organizations, legal service providers and non-governmental organizations. The groups shared the experiences and challenges of Black migrants in obtaining DHS services, such as language access.
- Meeting with local community organizations to share information on available DHS resources to prevent targeted violence.
- Meeting with legal service providers and non-governmental organizations who work with children and families. The discussion included an overview of the DHS Case Management Pilot Program and information on how CRCL advances disability access across the Department.
- Meeting with local Federal Protective Services to discuss access to facilities for individuals that have appointments with DHS or must appear in immigration court. Legal service providers and law students from Columbia University attended and shared their observations. Officials from the U.S. Department of Justice also participated in the meeting.

CRCL regularly hosts a range of community engagement events that can include interagency roundtables, civil society stakeholder listening sessions, public townhalls, and other community meetings. These events are designed to promote inclusive, policy-oriented, and solution-focused dialogue with diverse communities whose civil rights or civil liberties might be impacted by DHS programs and activities.

### **DHS Faith-Based Rule**

In March 2024, DHS and eight other federal organizations published a [joint final rule](#) entitled "Partnerships with Faith-Based and Neighborhood Organizations," with the goal of expanding the availability of social services to America's communities, including historically underserved and marginalized communities. This regulation, also known as the "Faith-Based Rule," imposes certain non-discrimination requirements in order to achieve this goal while protecting religious freedom and equity. The Faith-Based Rule requires that in providing social services to America's communities:

- Faith-based organizations receive equal protection of the law in applying for DHS financial assistance, AND
- Beneficiaries of services from faith-based organizations receiving DHS financial assistance are not discriminated against on the basis of religion.

CRCL oversees enforcement of the [Faith-Based Rule at DHS](#). CRCL ensures neither DHS, nor a State or local government, nor any other entity that administers any social service program supported by direct financial assistance from DHS, discriminates for or against an organization on the basis of the organization's religious character, motives, or affiliation, or lack thereof. Another important requirement of the Faith-Based Rule is organizations that receive DHS financial assistance to provide social services, *must provide notice* to individuals who participate in these services of their right to be free from religious discrimination. The notice provided by the DHS funded organization must state the following:

- The organization may not engage in discrimination based on religion, religious belief, or lack thereof.
- The organization may not require participation or attendance in any religious activity (any participation in such activities must be purely voluntary).
- All programs and services offered by the organization supported by DHS financial assistance must be separated in time and space from any privately funded religious activities.

This required notice is now [available in multiple languages](#). For additional information or questions about the Faith-Based Rule, please contact CRCL at: [crcl@hq.dhs.gov](mailto:crcl@hq.dhs.gov).

### **DHS Celebrates National Hispanic Heritage Month**

DHS celebrated National Hispanic Heritage Month with a virtual departmental program, “Pioneers of Change: Shaping the Future Together,” hosted by CRCL and the DHS Adelante employee association. The event featured remarks from CRCL Officer Shoba Sivaprasad Wadhia; Darnelly De Jesus, Deputy Assistant Director Office of Training, U.S. Secret Service; Juan Garcia Garcia, President of DHS Adelante Hispanic/Latin Employee Association, as well as keynote remarks from Joseph Acaba, NASA Astronaut and Chief of the Astronaut Office. During his



remarks, Mr. Acaba shared a compelling and inspirational story of his personal and professional journey, which brought him to NASA where he has logged a total of 306 days in space on three missions as a NASA Astronaut. Mr. Acaba discussed his diverse professional background in the U.S. Marine Corps, the U.S. Peace Corps, and as a middle and high school math and science teacher and how these experiences shaped him to become a NASA Astronaut and Chief of the Astronaut Office. He urged participants to be open to new experiences and new challenges stating, “I encourage people to challenge themselves and try new things—the opportunities will present themselves.” Mr. Acaba took several questions from the audience about his spaceflight experiences, sharing highlights about his day-to-day activities from work on the spacecraft to downtime with his fellow astronauts in space.

### **DHS Celebrates National Disability Employment Awareness Month**

Each October, DHS celebrates National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). NDEAM reminds us of the valued contributions people with disabilities make in our Nation’s workplaces and brings awareness to highlighting the importance of inclusive and accessible employment policies and practices. This year's theme, “Access to Good Jobs for All,” reflects the importance of ensuring that all workers, including those with disabilities, have the opportunity to prepare for, secure and advance in meaningful careers. The theme also reaffirms the Department’s commitment to providing equal access to quality employment opportunities for employees and applicants with disabilities. At DHS, we celebrate the diverse contributions, innovations, and perspectives of our employees with disabilities.



## **CRCL on the Road, October**

### ***October 18 – Philadelphia, Pennsylvania***

CRCL Officer Shoba Sivaprasad Wadhia spoke to the Asian Pacific American Bar Association of PA.

### ***October 21-23 – New York City, New York***

CRCL hosted a series of engagements with government partners and community stakeholders.

## **Additional information, and contacting us:**

The goal of this periodic newsletter is to inform members of the public about the activities of the DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, including: how to file complaints; ongoing and upcoming projects; opportunities to offer comments and feedback; etc. We distribute our newsletters via our stakeholder email list and make them available to community groups for redistribution. Issues of the newsletter can be accessed online at: [www.dhs.gov/crcl-newsletter](http://www.dhs.gov/crcl-newsletter).

If you would like to receive this newsletter via email, want to request back issues, or have other comments or questions, please let us know by emailing [crcloutreach@dhs.gov](mailto:crcloutreach@dhs.gov). For more information, including how to make a civil rights or civil liberties complaint about DHS activities, visit: [www.dhs.gov/crcl](http://www.dhs.gov/crcl).

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