

“MEGA MASTER” HEARINGS:

FAST CASES & BAD OUTCOMES



WHAT IS HAPPENING?

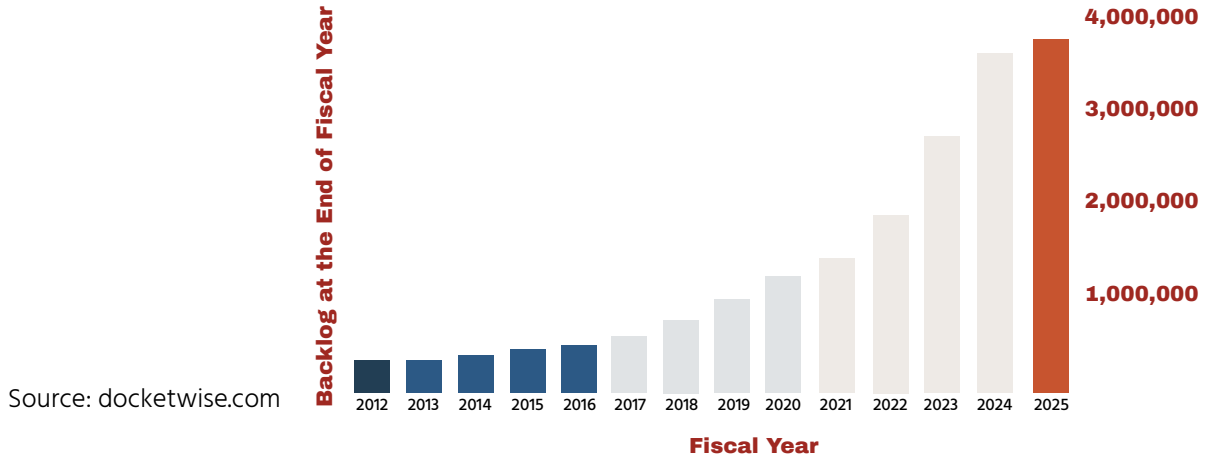
ON MAY 14, 2026,

attorneys began reporting what are being called “**mega master**” hearings, meaning that immigration courts were scheduling hearings for unusually large numbers of people at a time. This has resulted in the immigration courts **rescheduling hearings in some cases for much sooner**, and sometimes **without sufficient notice** to the person in proceedings. Because of this rescheduling, many people who did not appear at their hearing have received what are known as “in absentia” removal orders, which is when an immigration judge orders someone deported because the person did not attend court.

WHY WOULD THEY DO THIS?

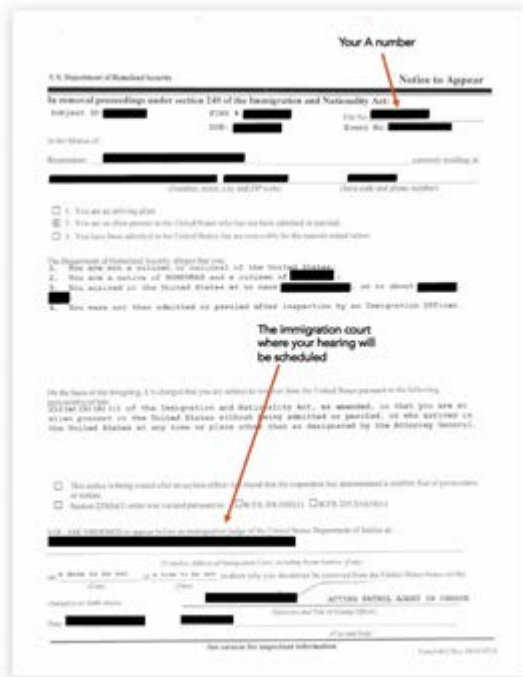
The latest effort to move cases quickly seems to be designed to deprive people of due process or the ability to fight their case in a fair way. We know that the Trump administration wants to deport as many people as quickly as possible, and this is their newest tactic.

The immigration courts have faced a very large backlog of cases for a long time. Most people agree that this is a problem—it means that people can be forced to wait years until their case can be decided. Almost everything that has been attempted to fix this problem has meant that some people end up moving their cases forward before they are ready, without enough notice, or in other ways that mean the process is unfair to them. However, these new “mega masters” and the rapid rescheduling of cases seem particularly bad.



WHAT IS A MASTER CALENDAR HEARING?

Master Calendar Hearings (abbreviated sometimes to “MCH” or called “masters”) are the procedural hearings that people have in the beginning of their case in immigration court where they admit or deny the facts that the government is telling the court about them (called “pleadings”), where the immigration judge sometimes determines eligibility for various forms of relief (like a green card from a family member, or asylum), and where additional hearings are scheduled.



Sometimes people go to master calendar hearings before they have a lawyer, even if they later hire one, and someone can have multiple master hearings.

Master Calendar Hearings often take place for many people at the same time in the same court without an individual time set. Even though everyone arrives at the same time, the judge normally calls people up **one at a time** by their A-number and explains things to them individually.

WHAT MAKES A “MEGA MASTER” DIFFERENT?



“Mega masters” are set for much larger numbers of people than normal - sometimes over 100 people are all set for the same time. This means a lot of people—including the respondents, their family, and their lawyers—are all crammed into the court and hallways. How these look and who they impact are varying by city, and they are not yet happening in every city. In some cities, it is mostly people who do not have attorneys who are being called in. In others, judges are denying requests for people to appear virtually via the WebEx video platform, meaning that people are required to show up in person to their hearing.

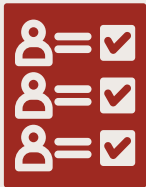
There are a few different reports about what these mega master hearings look like:



In one example, there is a roll call by court staff—not by the judge—and people who are present are asked to fill out a Form EOIR-33, which confirms or changes their address that is on file with the court, or a “pleading form,” which asks questions about whether what is on the Notice to Appear is correct and what application the person wants to file. If someone does not present themselves to the court staff, they receive a removal order.



In another example, people are all herded into the courtroom and the judge gives everyone instructions about their cases as a group and asks people to raise their hands if they understand. Nobody got any individual questions and anyone who did not confirm that they were present got a removal order.



In another example, people who already had individual hearings (the final trial hearing on their case) scheduled were called in for the court to confirm that they had the correct address on file. Anyone who was not present got a removal order.

WHAT IS THE CONSEQUENCE OF MISSING A MASTER CALENDAR HEARING?

People could easily miss their hearing for various reasons: they did not get notice that their hearing date was changed and moved up, they were a little bit late, they could not secure transportation or childcare or coverage at work for the new hearing date, or they were there in the court but did not hear their A-number or name called because of too much noise or because they speak a different language.

No matter the reason, if someone misses their hearing or the roll call, **they are almost certainly going to be ordered removed** (get a deportation order) because of their absence. This is called an **“in absentia removal order.”**

***In absentia* removal orders go into effect immediately, meaning that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (“ICE”) may deport them very quickly. Under immigration law, someone with a removal order, even in absentia, can be prevented from returning to the United States or getting lawful immigration status for many years. In addition, Congress recently imposed a \$5,130 fine for persons who receive in absentia orders of removal and are later detained by ICE. The Department of Homeland Security (“DHS”) recently [proposed](#) increasing that fine to \$18,000.**

Someone who receives an *in absentia* removal order can file what’s called a Motion to Rescind and Reopen to argue that they should be given a chance to present their case before the immigration court. Motions to Rescind and Reopen have strict deadlines (within 180 days of when the order is entered if the failure to appear was because of exceptional circumstances, but can be filed any time if the person did not receive proper notice of the hearing) and are expensive (\$1,065 filing fee, which can be waived, and there is no filing fee if the person did not receive proper notice of the hearing and their form of relief is asylum).

[You can learn more about Motions to Reopen here.](#)

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HOW WILL I KNOW IF THIS IS HAPPENING TO ME?



We recommend that everyone check their hearing date frequently (**maybe even once a day**) to see if it has changed. You can check your hearing date by using your A-number and country of citizenship on the [EOIR Automated Case Information website](#) or **hotline (1-800-898-7180)**.

If you notice that your hearing has been moved up, you should make sure that your lawyer (if you have one) is aware of the change. You should be prepared to either arrive early to the hearing or understand that the outcome of missing the hearing or even arriving late is giving up the opportunity to fight your case without the guarantee that you will have the opportunity again. Having a removal order also puts someone at greater risk of being detained by ICE, and, without a Motion to Rescind and Reopen, there would be no way to fight the deportation order from detention.