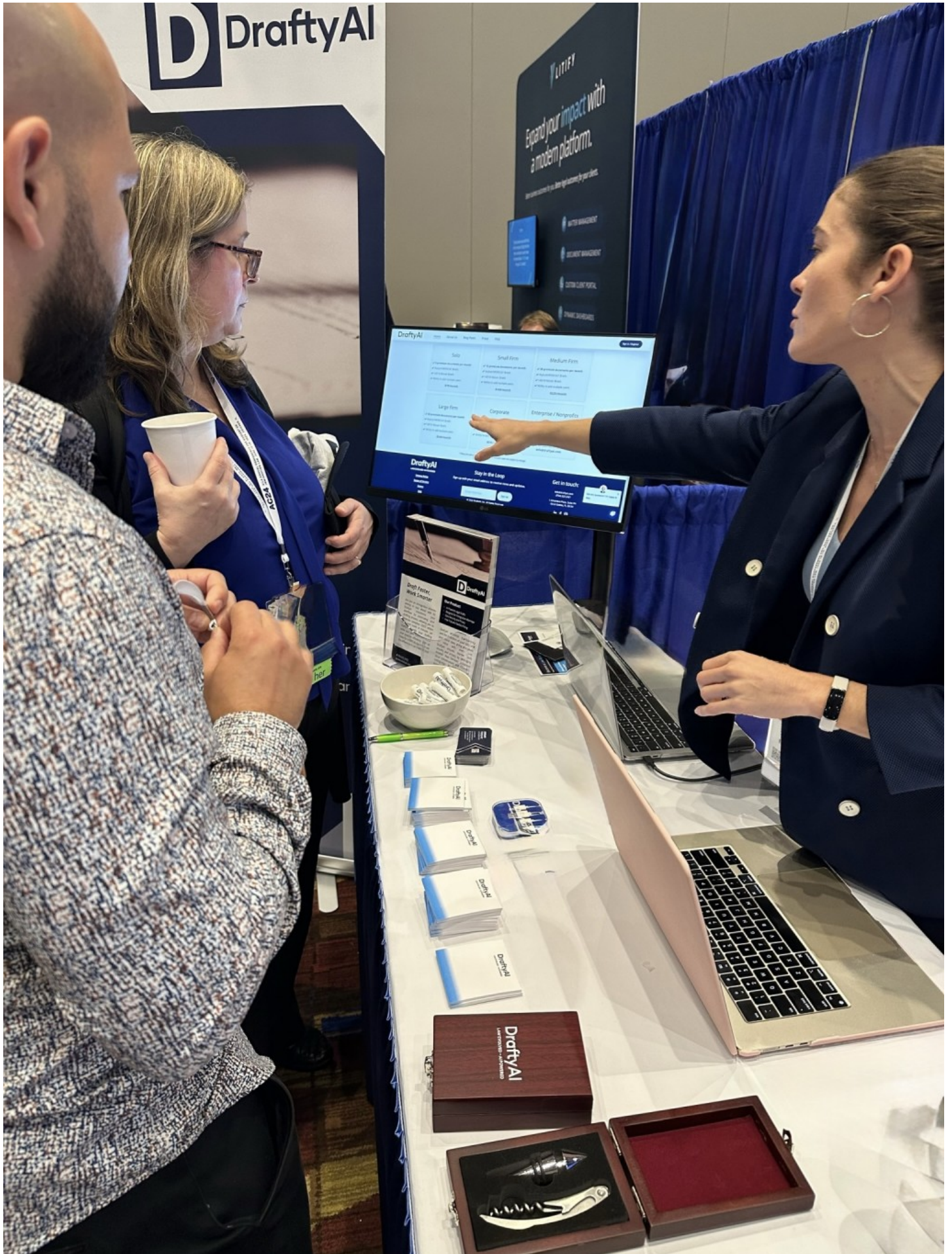


The immigration system is overwhelmed; one startup says the fix starts with the lawyers.

As policy debates dominate headlines, a team of immigrant founders argues the real bottleneck is on the attorney's desk.



Miami, Florida May 4, 2026 (IssueWire.com) - Nearly 12 million immigration applications are pending before U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, according to an April 2026 analysis by NPR, and the backlog has grown by more than 2 million cases since the start of 2025, according to the American Immigration Council. But while lawmakers debate policy overhauls and new visa categories, one legal technology startup is making a different argument, that the quality of what gets filed matters as much as how fast the government can process it.

[DraftyAI](#), an artificial intelligence platform built exclusively for immigration attorneys, says the crisis is not simply about understaffed agencies or shifting enforcement priorities. The company points to what happens between the moment a client walks into a lawyer's office and the moment a filing reaches a government desk, a stretch of the process that Navarro describes as largely manual, inconsistent and prone to the kinds of errors that generate additional government work.

"We do not talk enough about the fact that most immigration attorneys have 100-plus open cases and are working 60-plus-hour weeks while still behind on most of their case work. It's a never-ending cycle," said Nadine Navarro, an immigration attorney and chief executive of DraftyAI. "We can't control how fast the government moves, but we can control what lands on their desk. AI gives attorneys the ability to prepare petitions that are bulletproof, with fewer gaps and less human error, so cases move forward instead of coming back."

Immigration attorneys spend an estimated 40 to 60 percent of their working hours on case preparation, according to Navarro, a category that includes researching, organizing evidence, drafting petitions and briefs, responding to government evidence requests and assembling filing packages. A single brief can consume eight to 12 hours of attorney time, she said, and a response to a request for evidence can take a full day. Multiply that across dozens of active cases and firms hit a capacity ceiling.

The downstream effects compound in ways that are easy to overlook, according to immigration practitioners. When attorneys are stretched thin, filings go out with gaps, inconsistencies or missing documentation, which triggers requests for evidence from USCIS. Each of those requests creates a new cycle of government review, adding weeks or months to a case that might have been resolved on the first pass.

The instinct might be to assume that helping attorneys file faster would only add volume to an already overwhelmed system. Navarro argues the opposite.

"Speed without quality would absolutely make things worse," Navarro said. "But that is not what we are building. When a petition lands on an adjudicator's desk fully supported, with organized and labeled evidence, complete legal arguments, and nothing missing, it moves through the system instead of bouncing back. That makes a major difference."

[DraftyAI](#) automates the most time-intensive parts of immigration case preparation, according to the company. Attorneys input case facts and upload supporting documents, and the platform generates complete first drafts of petitions, briefs, motions and other filings in minutes. The system covers all immigration case types handled in U.S. practice. The company says its users report saving more than 60 percent of the time they previously spent on case preparation.

The platform also generates exhibit lists, case outlines and evidence organization, features the company says are designed to reduce the kind of incomplete filings that trigger additional government review cycles.

As more attorneys adopt AI tools for legal work, concerns about accuracy have grown alongside adoption. According to a database maintained by researcher Damien Charlotin at the HEC Paris Smart Law Hub, more than 1,400 cases of fabricated AI-generated legal citations have been submitted to courts globally, resulting in sanctions, fines and disciplinary referrals for attorneys who failed to verify their AI's output.

Navarro said DraftyAI was engineered specifically to prevent this. Rather than relying on general-purpose AI models that generate plausible-sounding but nonexistent case law, the platform pulls citations from a verified immigration legal research library and integrates them directly into drafts, according to the company.

"The hallucination problem exists because attorneys are using tools that were never designed for legal work and trusting them to do something they were never built to do," Navarro said. "Every citation DraftyAI produces comes from real, verified case law. We don't generate citations from patterns in training data. We pull them from an actual legal research library, and the attorney reviews everything before it goes out the door."

The consequences of attorney burnout extend beyond individual firms. According to the American Bar Association, lawyers experience depression, anxiety and substance abuse at rates significantly higher than the general population. Immigration attorneys, who carry both the legal complexity and emotional weight of their clients' cases, are among the most affected, Navarro said, and when attorneys leave the profession, their caseloads are redistributed to the colleagues who remain, compounding the pressure on an already strained system.

"We tell lawyers to work harder and we tell immigrants to be patient, but neither of those is a structural solution," Navarro said. "The goal is not just faster filings. The goal is better filings that don't come back."

The broader legal technology market is experiencing rapid growth. The 2024 Clio Legal Trends Report found that 79 percent of legal professionals reported using artificial intelligence in some capacity, up from 19 percent the year prior. But most legal AI tools target large corporate firms or general practice areas. Immigration law, with its specialized regulatory framework, unique document types and high emotional stakes, has been largely underserved by purpose-built technology, according to industry analysts.

[DraftyAI](#) was not built by outsiders looking for a market opportunity. All three co-founders are immigrants who have navigated the U.S. immigration system personally. Navarro is a practicing immigration attorney, and her two co-founders are engineers, including a chief technology officer who is a graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a former Y Combinator founder.

DraftyAI has been recognized by the American Bar Association Journal, Bloomberg Law and the American Immigration Lawyers Association, and is a member of the NVIDIA Inception Program and the MIT Venture Mentoring Service.

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