



# DENVER IMMIGRANT LEGAL SERVICES FUND

A 2020 Annual Report



The Denver Foundation



**DENVER**  
THE MILE HIGH CITY



# DENVER IMMIGRANT LEGAL SERVICES FUND

The Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund (DILSF) was created in 2018 to help vulnerable immigrants access fair legal representation and due process.

Established by the City of Denver and managed by The Denver Foundation, the fund provides grants to nonprofit organizations that offer direct legal representation to low-income Denver residents who face potential deportation. Nonprofits can use the fund to expand their access to pro bono or low bono attorneys.

The City of Denver is part of the Vera Institute of Justice's SAFE Network, a nationwide movement of communities dedicated to publicly funded, universal representation for immigrants facing detention and deportation.

Members of the City of Denver Advisory Board are appointed by Mayor Michael B. Hancock, Denver City Council, The Immigration Roundtable, Colorado Lawyers Committee, and The Denver Foundation.

## WHAT IS UNIVERSAL REPRESENTATION?

Universal representation promotes a public defender system in which every immigrant in detention proceedings is afforded counsel regardless of their personal circumstances. Providing representation to immigrants in removal proceedings is not about who deserves to stay or be deported; it is about bringing fairness to complex immigration proceedings and upholding our Constitution.

# 10x

**Immigrants are 10 times more likely to succeed in their case when they have representation.**

# 68%

**of immigrants in detention proceedings at the Aurora Immigration Court were unrepresented.**



**SNAPSHOT:**

# ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTED BY THE DENVER IMMIGRANT LEGAL SERVICES FUND



## LUTHERAN FAMILY SERVICES OF ROCKY MOUNTAINS

In 2020, with funding from the DILSF, Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains' Immigration Legal Services (ILS) program provided legal support to immigrants in areas such as Applications for Naturalization, Freedom of Information Act-related requests, and Petition for Alien Relative filings, among others.

In addition to continuing to serve immigrant populations who were served by ILS through the previous year's grant, ILS reached 170 new immigrant cases in 2020. ILS services open the door for many immigrants toward permanent residency and citizenship in the United States.

## JUSTICE AND MERCY LEGAL AID CLINIC

Justice and Mercy Legal Aid Center's Immigration Department (JAMLAC) provides high-quality representation to low-income Denver immigrants with removal defense and affirmative applications through a universal representation model. When full representation is not possible, JAMLAC provides legal consultations, advice, and advocacy while increasing pro bono capacity to provide additional representation.

With funding from the DILSF, JAMLAC served 213 individuals in 2020.





## SNAPSHOT:

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## ROCKY MOUNTAIN IMMIGRANT ADVOCACY NETWORK

The Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network (RMIAN) represents Denver residents detained in the ICE Contract Detention Facility in Aurora, where the need for legal aid is significant. The detention center has capacity for approximately 1,500 people; of these, more than 71% appear before immigration judges without a lawyer.

RMIAN serves people with incomes at or below 200% of the federal poverty guidelines. A previous grant from DILSF enabled RMIAN to pilot Colorado's first universal representation model and hire two full-time attorneys. As of October 2020, these attorneys had represented 58 Denver residents, including asylum-seekers, long-time lawful permanent residents, crime victims, Dreamers, and parents of U.S.-citizen children.



## UNIVERSITY OF DENVER'S STURM COLLEGE OF LAW IMMIGRATION LAW & POLICY CLINIC

At the University of Denver's Sturm College of Law Immigration Law & Policy Clinic (SCOL), law students provide direct legal services under attorney supervision to vulnerable immigrants, with an emphasis on detained indigent noncitizens who would otherwise likely go unrepresented, due to the complexity of their cases.

Funds made available through DILSF were used to recruit a clinical fellow with expertise in immigration law. The fellow has expanded capacity of the clinic and was able to represent 19 detained clients on 32 different legal matters.



# A STORY OF IMPACT

Milton is originally from Ecuador, where he grew up with his four brothers and sisters. He enjoyed his childhood and life in Quito and eventually went to study at a prominent university in the capital city. After visiting relatives in the United States, an opportunity arose that enabled Milton and his family to relocate there. Milton was granted a family-based immigration visa and his daughter was accepted into a university program for marine biology. This opportunity, however, was short lived. His family arrived in Florida in August 2001, one month before the tragedy of 9/11. Afterward, the program for international students that his daughter was enrolled in was suspended, preventing her from studying at the university. His daughter returned to Ecuador to finish her studies. As the separation and homesickness set in, eventually his son and wife both returned to Ecuador.

Milton decided to stay in the U.S. In his view, American people have respect for one another and their values, the U.S. has laws that protect individuals, and the economy is healthy. Milton came to Catholic Charities Immigration Services of Denver for assistance preparing and filing his citizenship application. If granted, citizenship will give him access to voting rights and travel without restriction, allowing him to visit his children and grandchild in Ecuador as frequently as he is able.

Lutheran Family Services of the Rocky Mountains recently helped a client file an initial Temporary Protected Status (TPS) application. After fleeing persecution in Venezuela, this applicant has lived in the United States without documentation for many years. Because of her lack of documentation and status, it has been difficult for her to find employment or gain other types of US identification, and she has experienced economic instability. If her application is approved and she receives work authorization alongside TPS, this will open up more job prospects and make it possible for her to apply for more permanent documentation and achieve economic stability.

**“Once detained in ICE custody days passed and I was confused. In reality, I had no idea how to face the proceedings, like many of the detainees that are here in the detention center. My lawyer not only allowed for me to retain my status as a permanent resident, but I can be together with my son and family.**

**— RMIAN CLIENT AND LONG-TIME DENVER RESIDENT REPRESENTED THROUGH THE DENVER IMMIGRANT LEGAL SERVICES FUND**



A photograph of a man and a woman embracing outdoors. The man, with short grey hair, is wearing a light blue and white checkered button-down shirt. He is kissing the woman on the cheek. The woman has dark hair and is wearing a dark blue long-sleeved shirt. They are standing in front of a blurred green background, likely foliage. The overall mood is intimate and supportive.

# COVID IMPACT

The COVID-19 pandemic was especially difficult for immigrants and refugees due to the combined challenges of limited access to healthcare, fear of legal repercussions, and employment concerns. Many immigrants and refugees are employed in frontline and essential industries that required employees to continue working despite the risks of COVID-19.

Detention facilities inherently put immigrants at risk because of crowded conditions. According to a report from Congressman Jason Crow, of approximately 460 people housed at the ICE Contract Detention Facility in Aurora, 96 were infected with COVID-19 in April 2021.

Adding to these challenges, DILSF-funded organizations were unable to meet with clients in person, instead relying on video and phone calls to conduct assessments, prepare for cases, and represent clients at trials.



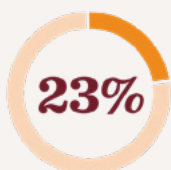
# IMPACT

## IMMIGRANT SHARE OF POPULATION

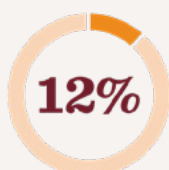


## SHARE OF WORKERS WHO ARE IMMIGRANTS

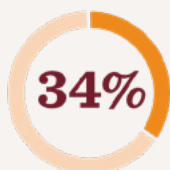
### Transportation & Warehousing



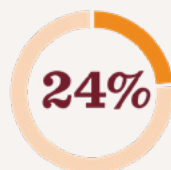
### Healthcare



### Construction Industry Entrepreneurs



### Food Sector



## ECONOMIC

Denver immigrants are significant contributors to Denver's economy. Immigrants pay \$3.9 billion in taxes and have spending power of \$10.5 billion. In contrast, it costs \$208 per day to detain an immigrant.

The average stay in detention for a person who is legally entitled to stay in the U.S. is 334 days. This amounts to nearly \$70,000 per year PAID BY TAXPAYERS to detain one individual.

## PUBLIC SAFETY

As fear of deportation increases, cooperation with law enforcement decreases. One study found that 70% of immigrants lacking legal status were found to be "less likely" to report crimes when they were victimized. Without cooperation, domestic violence cases have become among the hardest cases to prosecute.

## HEALTH

Legal status increases access to health insurance. Having more residents covered by health insurance would result in individuals, employers, the health care system, and societies at large saving money.

Legal status also impacts health in other ways. Children of parents without legal status suffer numerous physical and psychological health impacts due to prolonged stress and anxiety.

## EDUCATION

Immigration status opens the door to higher education by increasing access to many scholarships and financial aid options. 28% of Denver's foreign-born population has attained a bachelor's degree or higher.

For school-aged children of immigrants, parental engagement in school has been shown to predict academic improvement in immigrant children as well as prevent early drop out. This engagement can only happen when parents are not detained and when they are free from fear of deportation.

## CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Naturalization allows immigrants to participate fully in the civic life of their new country and is a powerful symbolic gesture of their commitment to their host society.

Naturalized citizens in Colorado are a large voting block with 142,402 immigrants eligible to vote throughout the state.



# 2020 IMPACT



**469**  
total  
served



**44%**  
Approved

**58%**  
Pending

\*Total percentage also include some grantees adding previous pending cases into their totals for 2020.



## HOW YOU CAN HELP

As a community foundation, The Denver Foundation relies on the generosity of donors to financially support our work in Metro Denver. The environment for immigrants and refugees is becoming increasingly hostile, creating a sense of fear in our communities.

We ask that you consider making a gift to the Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund to help provide ongoing critical services. We see this as a human issue rather than a political one, and invite you to join us in taking action to make a difference.

To learn more, please contact the Impact Group at 303.300.1790.

Please visit [denverfoundation.org](https://denverfoundation.org) and search "legal fund" to make an online donation.



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