

A photograph of two young women with dark hair, smiling and looking towards the camera. They are outdoors, with a blurred green background of trees. The woman on the left is wearing a maroon shirt, and the woman on the right is wearing a blue and white patterned shirt.

# DENVER IMMIGRANT LEGAL SERVICES FUND

2021 Annual Report



The Denver Foundation



**DENVER**  
THE MILE HIGH CITY



# DENVER IMMIGRANT LEGAL SERVICES FUND



**1.5M**

**granted to  
nonprofits that have  
provided direct  
legal services to**

**814**

**Denver  
residents**

On August 31, 2017, Mayor Michael B. Hancock signed Executive Order 142, “Standing with Immigrants and Refugees: A Safe and Welcoming City for all of Denver’s People,” with the goal of “ensuring all community members the rights and liberties that are guaranteed to them by the constitutions of the United States of America and the State of Colorado.” The order directed the creation of a legal services fund to achieve this goal.

The Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund was established in March 2018 as a special project fund at The Denver Foundation. Its purpose is to increase legal services to Denver’s immigrant community by providing qualified nonprofit organizations with grants to:

- Offer direct legal representation to immigrants in detention and/or subject to removal proceedings
- Provide affirmative relief to individuals seeking help with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and various visa programs
- Support capacity building or other innovative projects to help organizations increase the pool of pro bono or low bono immigration attorneys available to represent immigrants

The fund is managed by The Denver Foundation in partnership with a community advisory board composed of representatives from the Denver Mayor’s Office, Denver City Council, Colorado Lawyers Committee, immigrant rights groups, 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.

Since the Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund was established, it has granted more than \$1.5 million to nonprofits that have provided direct legal services to 814 Denver residents. More than 2,000 additional immigrants and refugees residing in Denver have been helped through referrals to other services, advising individuals and families on how to navigate the immigrant and refugee system, and participating in Know Your Rights trainings.

## SNAPSHOT

# ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTED BY THE DENVER IMMIGRANT LEGAL SERVICES FUND



## JUSTICE AND MERCY LEGAL AID CENTER

Justice and Mercy Legal Aid Center's (JAMLAC) Immigration Department 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 submitted 57 new cases in 2021, in addition to 61 pending cases. (Figures include cases that were initiated in previous years but have not been resolved.)

## LUTHERAN FAMILY SERVICES ROCKY MOUNTAINS

In 2021, 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. ILS services open the door for many immigrants to move toward permanent residency and citizenship in the United States. In addition to continuing to serve immigrant populations reached through the previous year's grant, ILS reached 100 new immigrant cases in 2021. To date, 129 cases are pending, including cases initiated in previous years but not yet resolved.





## SNAPSHOT

# ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTED BY THE DENVER IMMIGRANT LEGAL SERVICES FUND



## 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 70% 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. In 2021, RMIAN submitted 43 new cases, including asylum-seekers, longtime lawful permanent residents, crime victims, Dreamers, and parents of U.S.-citizen children. An additional 36 cases are pending, including cases initiated in previous years but not resolved.



## CATHOLIC CHARITIES AND COMMUNITY SERVICES OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF DENVER

Catholic Charities received its first grant from DILSF in 2021 to support its Immigration Services program, which was established in 1974 and has held Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) accreditation since 1980. The program's mission is to provide legal assistance to Colorado's indigent and low-income residents who have valid legal claims to status in the U.S.

Immigrants and refugees received assistance to prepare and file applications for immigration benefits in the areas of family visa processing, visas for victims of crime, DACA, temporary protection status, and naturalization. Catholic Charities also represented clients in removal proceedings regarding adjustment of status, cancellation of removal, waivers, voluntary departure, and prosecutorial discretion. The organization served 116 individuals in 2021.





# A STORY OF IMPACT

A Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network (RMIAN) attorney represented JCTC, a Honduran man, on his application for asylum and withholding of removal. In Honduras, JCTC was an anti-corruption opposition political activist and the victim of an assassination attempt by the international gang, MS-13.

JCTC was assigned to a visiting judge, a former ICE prosecutor, for JCTC's merits hearing. Over the course of two highly adversarial merits hearings, JCTC's RMIAN attorney argued multiple bases for JCTC's claims for withholding of removal and protection under the Convention Against Torture. His RMIAN attorney also presented a 60-page expert report and expert testimony on organized crime in Honduras. The Department of Homeland Security attorney opposed a grant of all relief. The judge ultimately denied all relief and ruled against JCTC on every element of his claims. JCTC appealed the case to the Board of Immigration Appeals, which remains pending.

Despite losing his case before the immigration judge, JCTC's experience demonstrates the importance of universal representation. JCTC felt that his due process was upheld and that he had presented his strongest defense. In a letter to his attorney, he wrote, "God will never forget everything that you did for me and my case. It is difficult to be here alone, to not have anyone that supports you, to fight for you, to be here by yourself incarcerated without having any criminal history. It is very difficult and unjust, and to know that you cannot return to your country, where your loved ones are, is even harder. God bless you with all his heart. Your actions will be seen by the king of kings."

## 10x

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

## 71%

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





# A STORY OF IMPACT

In a previous grant year, Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains (LFSRM) submitted a family petition for the wife of an Afghan client who had worked with U.S. troops overseas and had come to the U.S. under a Special Immigrant Visa. The client's application was subsequently approved, and due to the continued support of the DILSF, LFSRM was able to assist him with continued representation through the consular process for his wife. Her overseas case was submitted in early 2021 and was still awaiting an interview when the evacuation of U.S. troops from Afghanistan began in August. Colorado is now home to approximately 2,000 evacuees, including a significant number who now reside in Denver.

The LFSRM Legal Services Director met with the original client and numerous other Afghans to submit human rights evacuation lists and Department of State repatriation forms and contact Senators and members of Congress. While LFSRM successfully brought many clients out of Afghanistan, the client mentioned above was not among them. She waited at the airport for three days without gaining access, then returned home for a few days while LFSRM developed a new plan to bring her into the airport. Unfortunately, the day of her planned evacuation was August 26, the same day two suicide bombers and gunmen attacked crowds of Afghans flocking to Kabul's airport, killing 60 Afghans and 13 U.S. troops. After that tragedy, the client felt unsafe returning to the airport and remains in Afghanistan. LFSRM continues to work closely with her on a strategy to either apply for humanitarian parole or transfer the NVC case to an embassy outside of Afghanistan if she can leave the country.



# COVID IMPACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has continued to be especially difficult for immigrants and refugees due to the combined challenges of limited access to health care, fear of legal repercussions, and employment concerns. Many immigrants and refugees are employed in frontline and essential industries that have 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 throughout much of 2020 and 2021, instead relying on video and phone calls to conduct assessments, prepare for cases, and represent clients at trials.





# IMPACT

## IMMIGRANT SHARE OF POPULATION



## FRONT LINE WORKERS

Immigrants serve in essential industries and carry out vital roles that keep the country functioning.

### Food Sector



### Healthcare



### Transportation & Warehousing



## 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 "less likely" to report crimes when they were victimized. Without cooperation, domestic violence cases have become among the most challenging to prosecute.

## HEALTH

Legal status increases access to health insurance. Having more residents covered by health insurance would result in financial savings for individuals, employers, the health care system, and society at large.

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. Only 28% of Denver's foreign-born population has attained a bachelor's degree or higher.

For school-aged children of immigrants, parental engagement has been shown to predict children's academic improvement as well as prevent early dropouts. This engagement can only happen when parents are not detained and 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 significant voting bloc, with 142,402 immigrants eligible to vote throughout the state.



# 1,035

**reached**

*\*Includes screened individuals who were referred to other services and/or to funded organizations that provided consultation but did not provide long-term services)*



# 2021- 2022

**BY THE NUMBERS**



# 316

**New Cases  
Submitted**

# 258

**Pending  
Cases**

*\*includes cases initiated in previous years but not resolved)*



In 2021,

# 420

**eligible residents  
could not be assisted  
due to staff capacity at  
funded organizations, an  
indication of the continued  
need for this fund.**

# 176

**Cases/  
Approved**

# 0

**Deported/  
Denied**





# 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.



The Denver Foundation

1009 Grant Street  
Denver, CO 80203

303.300.1790  
[information@denverfoundation.org](mailto:information@denverfoundation.org)

[denverfoundation.org](https://denverfoundation.org)