

A portrait of an elderly woman with a warm, smiling expression. She has dark hair pulled back and is wearing a white blouse with a vibrant floral pattern in red, pink, and blue. The background is filled with large, dark green leaves, creating a natural and serene setting.

DENVER IMMIGRANT LEGAL SERVICES FUND

Annual Report

Released August 2023

Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund
November 2021 - October 2022 Grant Cycle

Limited Legal Fellowship Program
June 2022 - May 2023 Grant Cycle



The Denver Foundation



DENVER
THE MILE HIGH CITY

IMPACT REPORT

DENVER IMMIGRANT LEGAL SERVICES FUND

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

Limited Legal Fellowship Program

In response to additional unmet needs in both removal defense and affirmative representation in the community, The Denver Foundation and The City and County of Denver offered a two-year opportunity (2022-2023) to provide funding for nonprofits to add one additional qualified, community-focused immigration attorney fellow, and dedicated paralegal for one year with eligibility to renew for a second year. Funding for this fellowship can also include funds to assist with representation-related fees such as filing fees, paying for expert reports for asylum cases, or covering the costs of language interpretation.

These funds are 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.



\$2.3M

granted to nonprofits
that have provided
direct legal services to

2,752

Denver residents
since inception.

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 \$2.3 million to nonprofits that have provided direct legal services to 2,752 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.

LUTHERAN FAMILY SERVICES ROCKY MOUNTAINS

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.



ROCKY MOUNTAIN IMMIGRANT ADVOCACY NETWORK

The Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network (RMIAN) provides free legal representation to Denver children and families in immigration proceedings before the Denver Immigration Court and immigration agencies. RMIAN also represents Denver residents detained at the ICE Contract Detention Facility in Aurora, a detention center that has capacity for approximately 1,500 people. More than 65% of people before the Denver and Aurora Immigration Courts appear without a lawyer. RMIAN serves people with incomes at or below 200% of the federal poverty guidelines.



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 United States. 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.

ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTED BY THE DENVER IMMIGRANT LEGAL SERVICES FUND



CENTER FOR TRAUMA AND RESILIENCE

The Center for Trauma & Resilience (CTR) provides a no-cost, confidential, single point of entry that supports the healing and recovery of survivors of trauma in our community. CTR fills gaps in services by primarily assisting victims who are traditionally underserved or ignored due to race, age, ethnicity, gender, language, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, immigration status, or ability level. At CTR, survivors receive crisis intervention, care management, behavioral health services, health and wellness services, support groups, and emergency financial assistance.

INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE

The International Rescue Committee's (IRC) work encompasses the continuum of the refugee experience, from flight to resettlement to integration. The IRC in Denver has served nearly 3,000 refugees, Special Immigrant Visa recipients, asylum-seekers, asylees, Amerasians, Cuban and Haitian Entrants, secondary migrants, immigrants, Afghan and Ukrainian humanitarian parolees, and survivors of torture. As a holistic provider that serves most clients for five years or more to support not only their initial stability but also their longer-term integration, IRC in Denver is a trusted resource within the community. IRC in Denver's programs include case management, intensive stabilization services, economic empowerment programming, health coordination, youth services, psychosocial support services, torture rehabilitation programming, immigration legal services, and co-sponsorship and mentoring programs.



COLORADO ASYLUM CENTER

The Colorado Asylum Center (CAC) is a Colorado-based nonprofit organization committed to providing zealous representation and advocacy to asylum seekers throughout the United States. In some cases, CAC will provide direct legal representation to asylum seekers before the immigration courts, federal courts, and administrative agencies. CAC organizes and sponsors pro bono legal services workshops to expand the availability of legal advice and services to more people who need the help of an attorney to move their own case forward, including asylum seekers who have had their deportation proceedings accelerated through the Family Unit Docket.



IMPACT

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. (Source: *American Immigration Council*)

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. (Source: policylink.org/sites/default/files/INSECURE_COMMUNITIES_REPORT_FINAL.PDF)

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 33% of Denver's foreign-born population has attained a bachelor's degree or higher. (Source: newamericaneconomy.org/city/denver)

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 167,719 immigrants eligible to vote throughout the state. (Source: newamericaneconomy.org/city/denver)



LEGAL FUND MAKING A DIFFERENCE

When Edna Chavez was 17 years old, she decided to flee her home country of Guatemala by herself. She was being threatened and prosecuted by gang members because she refused to prostitute her body and pimp other teens her age. Her decision was so sudden, she didn't say goodbye to her family. Not even her mom.

To this day, her mom still doesn't know why she left.

In May 2019, Chavez entered a detention center in Arizona for unaccompanied minors. "It was an experience that changed my life," she said. Chavez was in the shelter for several months until she was placed into foster care. Ultimately, she was adopted* by a family in Colorado.

That's when she met pro bono lawyers with the Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network (RMIAN), an organization that provides free immigration legal services to immigrant children and to adults in immigration detention. The Denver Foundation supports RMIAN as a grantee of its Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund.

The fund's purpose is to increase legal services to Denver's immigrant community by granting to nonprofits in three areas; to provide 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, and/or support capacity building to help organizations increase the pool of pro bono or low bono immigration attorneys available to represent immigrants.

For the last three years, RMIAN has been helping Chavez with her immigration case. They're working to get her permanent residency as she focuses on being a first-generation college student.

Today, Chavez is a freshman at Colorado State University in Fort Collins studying mathematics. She hopes to work for an insurance company or with NASA.

"That's something I will forever be grateful for," she said.

"I've been able to learn English, go to school, and focus on school because I don't have to worry about working all the time to pay lawyer fees," said Chavez. Instead, she works seasonally to send her family money and pay for half her tuition.

RMIAN has been helping Chavez with her immigration case thanks in part to funds from the Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund.

10x

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

87%

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

(Sources: Vera Institute; Why Does Representation Matter?; TRAC Reports, Inc.)



“They don’t just focus on legal representation, they care for the person they represent,” said Chavez.

Since the City and County of Denver and The Denver Foundation established the Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund, \$2.3 million has been granted to nonprofits, \$409,795 of that has been raised by community donations.

More than 2,650 people have been helped during their immigration proceedings. One of the purposes of the fund is to provide legal representation to immigrants and refugees who might not otherwise have a fair proceeding. It is not about who deserves to stay; it’s about bringing fairness to complex systems that pit immigrants against experienced government attorneys, and tear communities and families apart.

The way it works

Qualified nonprofit organizations apply to receive funds through The Denver Foundation’s Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund. If approved, these organizations can use the money to provide direct legal representation to low-income people who are living in Denver and are subject to deportation. Resources can also be used to help nonprofits expand the pool of pro bono or low-bono attorneys helping with these efforts.

In 2022, RMIAN alone provided free legal representation through this funding to 41 Denver residents who were facing deportation proceedings, including children and families, and individuals in detention. Thus far in 2023, RMIAN has been representing 34 Denver residents in their immigration proceedings through this fund. Clients are from a diverse group of countries, including Afghanistan, Brazil, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Nicaragua.

“As a child and grandchild of immigrants, it is so meaningful for me to support immigrant families through my role at RMIAN,” said Sabrina Sameshima, senior staff attorney with RMIAN. “The Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund allows me to pay

forward those neighbors, organizations, and community members who helped my own family establish a life in Denver. I am proud that Denver has stood up to work toward universal representation for everyone in immigration proceedings and to be a part of this movement.”

Impact and next steps

There was such a need for the Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund that the City and County of Denver approved another \$500,000 divided into two years for this fund. That comes to a total of \$2.2 million granted.

Deportation proceedings are the only legal proceedings in the United States where people are detained without access to legal representation. We believe legal defense should not only be accessible to those who can afford it. Immigrants are more than 10 times more likely to be able to stay in the country when they have representation. These funds help make sure families have a fair opportunity to stay together. Often, one family member faces deportation while the rest of the members do not.

With these extra funds, more people in Denver will receive a fairer immigration process, affirmative relief services, and Denver will expand our capacity of immigration attorneys in the Denver Metro region.

If you’d like to be a part of this impact, you can make a gift to the Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund to help provide ongoing critical services. Since November 2021, 276 people were turned away due to not having enough capacity. To learn more, please click [here](#).

**Edna uses the word adoption symbolically as her Colorado family fulfills the definition of family in their love and support for her. Edna’s Colorado family are her lawful custodians via a non-adoption court proceeding.*

PICTURED ABOVE On the left: Edna Chavez in her new home, Colorado. On the right: Edna Chavez in her home country of Guatemala.



903
REACHED
**Includes screened individuals who were referred to other services or to funded organizations that provided consultation but did not provide long-term services*



**BY THE
NUMBERS**

**Denver Immigrant
Legal Services Fund
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**Limited Legal
Fellowship Program
June 2022 - May 2023
Grant Cycle**





276

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



747

NEW CASES SUBMITTED

726

PENDING CASES

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



259

CASES/APPROVED

3

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 by email at dilsf@denverfoundation.org or by calling 303.300.1790.

To make a donation, please visit:
denverfoundation.org/fund/denver-immigrant-legal-services-fund



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