



DENVER IMMIGRANT LEGAL SERVICES FUND

Annual Report

RELEASED APRIL 2024

Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund
November 2022–October 2023

Limited Legal Fellowship Program
June 2022–May 2023



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.



\$2.54M

granted to nonprofits
that have provided
direct legal services to

4,185

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 \$2.54 million to nonprofits that have provided direct legal services and referrals to other services, advised individuals and families on how to navigate the immigrant and refugee system, and participated in Know Your Rights trainings.



1,311

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

Data from Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund cycle November 2022 – October 2023 and Limited Legal Fellowship Program cycle June 2022 – May 2023





263
 eligible residents
 could not be assisted
 due to staff capacity at
 funded organizations, an
 indication of the continued
 need for this fund.



685
 NEW CASES
 SUBMITTED

704
 PENDING CASES
**includes cases initiated in
 previous years but not resolved*



377
 CASES/APPROVED

4
 DEPORTED/DENIED



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.

SNAPSHOT

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, emergency financial assistance, and legal services.

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.



JUNTOS2COLLEGE

Juntos Community envisions a society where every person has access to high quality jobs and careers that provide a living wage and build generational wealth. This includes our undocumented Americans. Its mission is to significantly increase the number of undocumented Americans/people into the workforce. With DACAWorks, Juntos Community helps DACA-recipients/Dreamers learn how to renew their work permits so they can become self-advocates and self-sufficient. They remove the fear and uncertainty during the renewal process, as well as remove financial barriers with their DACA Grant Fund. They are a bilingual, immigrant-led organization, with 50% or more of the team having been DACA recipients.



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

A NEW BEGINNING FOR THE YEPEZ FAMILY

Six months ago, a family of four stepped into a new world in the U.S. Cristian, his wife, and their two little girls brought more than just luggage—they carried a story of courage and determination.

In Venezuela, life was tougher than many of us can imagine. A family in Venezuela earns about \$5 a month. A dozen eggs costs \$4, and a gallon of milk costs \$8. Flour, butter, and the basic food that we take for granted could eat up a month's pay. Teachers earn so little that they barely manage to open schools for two days a week.

Living in Venezuela, Cristian's daughters dreamed of milk with their morning cereal, but consider it a luxury they can't afford.

Cristian made ends meet by making ice cream and selling it on the streets in Venezuela. Gangs he said were backed by the government demanded \$100 a week just to let him continue to sell his ice cream. It was much more than he could afford.

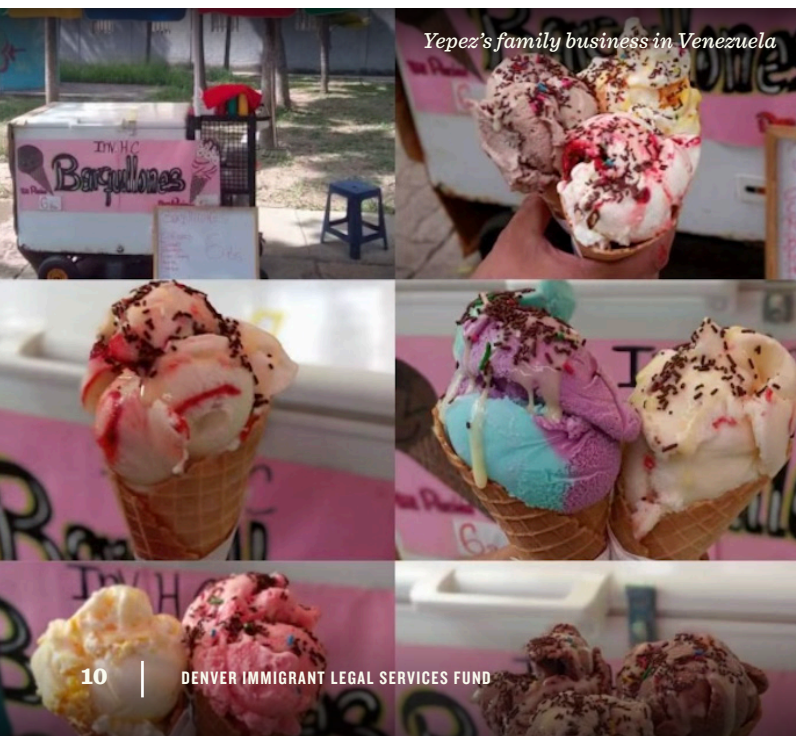
That is when Cristian and his wife decided to leave Venezuela with their two girls and come to the U.S.

Their journey was not easy. They faced the terrifying Darien jungle, where they saw unspeakable things, like a young man who just... gave up. On their journey there was no food, and they were exhausted from carrying their 4- and 6-year-old girls on their shoulders. Despite all that, they were walking towards a dream.

“ WE HAVE TALENTS, AND WE ARE HERE TO WORK. THAT'S ALL WE WANT. WE CAME HERE TO WORK AND TO ADD TO THIS CITY. ”

Crossing borders and dealing with uncertainties, they made it to Mexico, to the U.S., and through the U.S. Customs and Border Protection - CBP One™ process. They missed home, but were grateful for the safety they found.

And they were grateful for the Justice and Mercy Legal Aid Center (JAMLAC). 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.





JAMLAC holds work permit workshops, which help migrants who have recently arrived in the U.S. apply for their Employment Authorization Document (EAD)/work permit, a crucial step in building their new lives here. It was at this workshop where the Yepez family found helping hands. Dedicated volunteers assist many newcomers, just like Cristian’s family, to navigate the maze of obtaining work permits.

Now, Cristian looks forward to putting his HVAC skills to use, while his wife is eager to pick up her psychology studies.

“We have talents, and we are here to work. That’s all we want. We came here to work and to add to this city. I love the English language,” Cristian says.

His daughters, now with bellies full of milk and cereal, dream. One wants to help heal others as a doctor, and the other wants to paint the world with her colors.

The Yepez family is grateful to Justice and Mercy Legal Aid Center, the workshops, the volunteers, and all the organizations who helped them. Cristian feels like they made a “miracle,” and gave him a chance to work and live with dignity. For Cristian, not just about the social security number or the work permit—it’s the chance to succeed and be part of a community that welcomes them.

Justice and Mercy Legal Aid Center, and funding from the Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund managed by The Denver Foundation made it possible.

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.)



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



The Denver Foundation

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