

# DENVER IMMIGRANT LEGAL SERVICES FUND

## Annual Report

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**RELEASED APRIL 2025**

Denver Immigrant Services Fund  
November 2023–October 2024

Limited Legal Fellowship Program  
June 2023–May 2024



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 and “the preservation of families and protection of children residing in Denver.”

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 community members 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

As of December 2024, 82% of immigrants in Colorado with pending deportation cases did not have legal representation and were navigating their deportation proceedings alone.<sup>1</sup> Without legal representation, there’s also concern that their due process rights could be violated. The need for these services is critical, as individuals and families face mounting challenges in an already complex and overwhelming system.

Ensuring continued funding for these programs is essential to protect the rights of vulnerable populations and uphold the integrity of the immigration process.

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1: <https://www.vera.org/ending-mass-incarceration/reducing-incarceration/detention-of-immigrants/advancing-universal-representation-initiative/immigration-court-legal-representation-dashboard>



**\$3.12M**

granted to nonprofits  
that have provided  
direct legal services to

**6,308**

Denver residents  
since inception.

Aug. 2017 press conference where Mayor  
Michael B. Hancock signed Executive Order 142.  
*Photo provided by Kevin J. Beaty, Denverite.*

## 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 (2022-2024) to provide funding for nonprofits to add an additional qualified, community-focused immigration attorney fellow, and a dedicated paralegal for one year with eligibility to renew for a second year. Funding for this fellowship also included 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.

The Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund and the Limited Legal Fellowship Program 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.

# BRINGING FAIRNESS TO IMMIGRATION PROCEEDINGS

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.

**“ONE OF THE KEY FOUNDATIONS IS THAT WE LIVE UNDER THE RULE OF LAW, NO MATTER WHO YOU ARE AND WHAT PARTY YOU SUPPORTED, YOU’RE TO BE TREATED FAIRLY JUST LIKE EVERYBODY ELSE AND IF WE STARTED SEEING ACTIONS THAT WERE ARBITRARY BASED ON WHO YOU ARE, THAT’S A CORE THREAT TO THE AMERICAN SYSTEM.”**

— STATE ATTORNEY GENERAL PHIL WEISER

People facing removal proceedings deserve to understand the options before them, have their voices heard, and engage in a process where fairness and transparency bring justice regardless of the case outcome.

Beyond justice, legal representation can help maintain stability in families, communities, and economies. Detention and deportation separate families, result in loss of income, and often loss of employment. They create financial instability, taking a social and economic toll on everyone involved. This impact is especially profound for children, who experience trauma when a parent or caretaker is taken away.

On a community and economic level, legal representation can help people obtain or maintain legal work authorization, allowing them to contribute to the economy not only as consumers but also as taxpayers.<sup>2</sup>

Since the Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund was established, it has granted more than \$3.12 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.

<sup>2</sup>: <https://www.vera.org/advancing-universal-representation-toolkit/the-case-for-universal-representation-1>

## BY THE NUMBERS

# IMPACT ON OUR COMMUNITIES

## WELL-BEING

### SOCIAL

#### 90,000 children at risk

of **mental health problems, lower academic achievement, and economic insecurity** in Colorado. The detention and deportation of parents and close family members contribute to the stress and instability these children and families face.<sup>3</sup>

### ECONOMIC

#### \$4.3M in lost income

was estimated for detained immigrants in Colorado in 2023. Across three years, the combined lost income is estimated to be \$10 million. Immigrants detained without representation were unable to work, **increasing the financial hardship for families and individuals.**<sup>3</sup>

## ECONOMIC

### TAX CONTRIBUTIONS AND SPENDING POWER

#### \$781.4M in taxes

are paid by immigrants in Denver County, who also contribute a spending power of \$2.4 billion. Their economic impact is vital to the community as taxpayers and in helping fund social services and other programs.<sup>4</sup>

### WORKFORCE

#### 84.2% of immigrants are working-age

in the Metro Denver area and are more likely to be active in the labor force.<sup>6</sup> In Denver County alone, there are 5,879 entrepreneurs who are immigrants.<sup>4</sup> They are key contributors to economic growth and new job creation.

### COST OF DETAINING

#### \$236.52 per day

is the **cost to detain a single person.**<sup>5</sup>

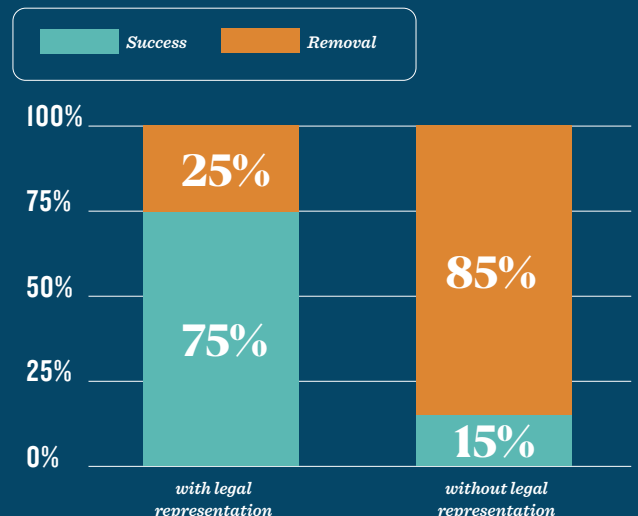
## PUBLIC SAFETY

### LEVELS OF TRUST

#### 70% “less likely” to report crimes

Immigrants without legal status are less likely to speak up when victimized. **As fear of deportation increases, trust and cooperation with law enforcement decrease.**<sup>7</sup>

### THOSE IN IMMIGRATION COURTS WITH SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES:



Source: <https://coloradofiscal.org/impacts-and-benefits-of-investing-in-immigration-justice-colorado-immigration-legal-defense-fund/>

3: <https://coloradofiscal.org/impacts-and-benefits-of-investing-in-immigration-justice-colorado-immigration-legal-defense-fund/>

4: <https://data.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/map-the-impact/>

5: <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/mass-deportation>

6: <https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/city/denver/>

7: [https://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/INSECURE\\_COMMUNITIES\\_REPORT\\_FINAL.PDF](https://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/INSECURE_COMMUNITIES_REPORT_FINAL.PDF)



**2,457**  
**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

### INCREASING LEGAL REPRESENTATION

*Data from Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund cycle November 2023 – October 2024 and Limited Legal Fellowship Program cycle June 2023 – May 2024*





**203**

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



**2,350**  
NEW CASES SUBMITTED

**949**  
PENDING CASES  
*\*includes cases initiated in previous years but not resolved*



**623**  
CASES/APPROVED

**15**  
DEPORTED/DENIED



## SNAPSHOT

# ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTED BY THE DENVER IMMIGRANT LEGAL SERVICES FUND

## INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE

The International Rescue Committee's (IRC) work encompasses the continuum of the refugee experience, from flight to resettlement to integration. IRC in Denver provides immigration legal services as part of its comprehensive programs, helping individuals achieve both initial stability and long-term integration.



## COLORADO ASYLUM CENTER

The Colorado Asylum Center assists asylum seekers in Denver who cannot afford counsel with legal representation and pro bono asylum application workshops.

## ROCKY MOUNTAIN IMMIGRANT ADVOCACY NETWORK

The Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network (RMIAN) provides free legal representation to Denver children and families in immigration proceedings and to Denver residents detained at the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Contract Detention Facility in Aurora.

## LUTHERAN FAMILY SERVICES ROCKY MOUNTAINS

Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains' Immigration Legal Services (ILS) Program provides legal support to immigrants in areas such as naturalization applications, review of Freedom of Information Act documents, and relative petitions filings, among others.





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

Catholic Charities provides legal assistance and representation to Colorado's indigent and low-income residents who have valid legal claims to status in the United States through its Immigration Services program.

## JUNTOS COMMUNITY

Juntos Community's mission is to increase the number of undocumented people in the workforce. Through DACAWorks, Juntos Community helps Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients through the DACA renewal process. They also help remove financial barriers with their DACA Grant Fund.

## THE CENTER FOR TRAUMA AND RESILIENCE

Through its AVAIL program, The Center for Trauma & Resilience (CTR) provides free legal assistance for both U Visa applications and petitions under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA).



## JUSTICE AND MERCY LEGAL AID CENTER

Justice and Mercy Legal Aid Center's (JAMLAC) Immigration Department provides high-quality representation, legal consultations, advice, and advocacy to low-income Denver immigrants with removal defense and affirmative applications through a universal representation model.



# HOME IS HERE

As an infant, Diana arrived in the United States and, shortly after, was placed into the foster care system. Circumstances beyond Diana's control shaped her future. It wasn't until she was 17 and in high school that she was connected to legal support for immigration assistance. That's when she began working with the Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network (RMIAN). They provided her with free legal representation to reopen and dismiss the removal order that was entered against Diana as a young child that she wasn't even aware of.

RMIAN secured a court order stating that Diana had been abandoned as a child and that it would not be in her best interest to return to Mexico. RMIAN then applied for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, employment authorization, and Diana's social security card, all of which were approved. In 2024, Diana was finally eligible to apply for lawful permanent residency, securing her place in the only country she has ever truly called home.

## A MOTHER'S JOURNEY TO SUPPORT HER FAMILY

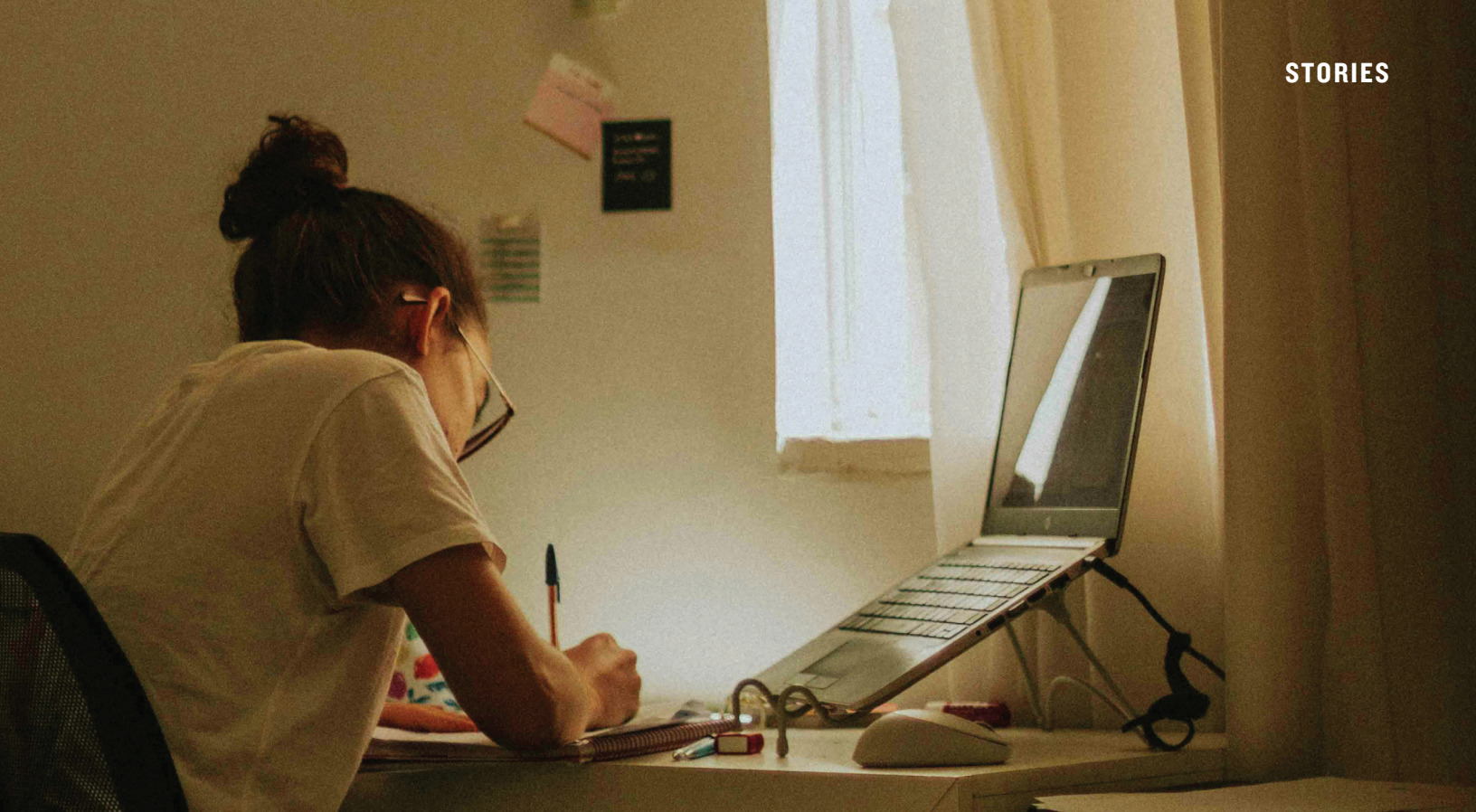
Liz (name changed to protect confidentiality) was brought to the United States by her parents when she was just 5 years old. She didn't discover that she was undocumented until she was 17 years old.

After having her first child, she wanted a steady job to provide for her family. She went to Catholic Charities of Denver, hoping to get the work authorization she needed to find more secure employment. She applied for and was granted Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status with their help. Every two years, she returned to Catholic Charities to renew her work authorization.

In 2023, when Liz returned for her two-year renewal, Catholic Charities screened for options for legal permanent residence. Based on several factors, Liz was eligible to apply. Catholic Charities guided Liz through the application process, and she was granted lawful permanent residency in the summer of 2024.

Denver has been home to Liz since she was a child. She's watched her daughter attend Metro State University and has spent years building connections in this community. With the guidance and support of Catholic Charities, Liz is now embracing a future of stability and opportunity for herself and her family.





## HELPING DREAMERS NAVIGATE DACA RENEWALS TO SUPPORT THEMSELVES AND THEIR FAMILIES

MJ works at a nonprofit that provides culturally responsive behavioral health services in partnership with public schools. As a Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipient, MJ recalls how stressful it was to renew her status the first time. She was a college student who went to school full time and worked full time. The paperwork and the whole process were difficult to navigate.

Because she didn't send in a check for the right amount to cover the fees, her first renewal application was rejected – and she didn't have the funds to reapply.

Then MJ learned about Juntos Community and its DACAWorks program. Juntos provided a grant to cover the cost of reapplying and walked MJ through the process to a successful renewal.

For her, what Juntos offers extends beyond just helping with government paperwork. “I find myself often having to even explain to people what DACA is. So, to go to a place where people know what it's about and have gone through similar struggles, it's always refreshing to be in a space where I'm around people who understand it,” she says.

# HOW YOU CAN HELP

**COLORADO RANKS THE LOWEST IN THE NATION IN THE PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE ATTORNEYS IN IMMIGRATION COURT, WITH A REPRESENTATION RATE OF JUST 14%.<sup>8</sup>**

When immigrants lack legal representation, they are denied fairness in the immigration process. Families fear separation, workers risk losing their livelihoods, and households face financial instability, all while navigating an often overwhelming and complex system. This uncertainty disrupts lives and prevents communities from fully benefiting from the potential and contributions of immigrants, who are eager to build a secure future for themselves and those around them.

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

<sup>8</sup>: <https://coloradofiscal.org/impacts-and-benefits-of-investing-in-immigration-justice-colorado-immigration-legal-defense-fund/critical-services>.



## TO LEARN MORE

email: [dilsf@denverfoundation.org](mailto:dilsf@denverfoundation.org)

call: 303.300.1790

## TO MAKE A DONATION

visit: [denverfoundation.org/fund/denver-immigrant-legal-services-fund](https://denverfoundation.org/fund/denver-immigrant-legal-services-fund)



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