



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

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

More than **90%** of Metro Denver residents believe that access to attorneys

for all people, including those in immigration court, is important*. **71%** of immigrants in detention proceedings at the Aurora Immigration Court were unrepresented.

*Data based on a forthcoming report by the Vera Institute, verainstitute.org

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.

SNAPSHOT: ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTED BY THE DENVER IMMIGRANT LEGAL SERVICES FUND

With funding from the DILSF, **The Justice and Mercy Legal Aid Clinic (JAMLAC)** provided full legal representation services to 141 Denver immigrants at all stages of the immigration process between September 2018 and September 2019.

JAMLAC typically specializes in legal representation for victims of crime. The DILSF has allowed JAMLAC to expand non-victim-related support for immigrants in Denver. Clients represented through the DILSF include juveniles; seekers of asylum, permanent residency, naturalization, and DACA protections; U Visa applicants; and those filing Violence Against Women Act self-petitions. All clients were low-income and 83% were victims of a crime.

In many cases, JAMLAC represented many of the same immigrants in family law and other general civil legal matters. In 2019, JAMLAC launched the Pro Bono Project to connect private attorneys with pro bono opportunities to provide low-income Denver immigrants with full legal representation.

In 2019, with funding from the DILSF, **Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains (LFSRM)** provided legal support to 47 immigration-related cases. These included Applications for Naturalization, Freedom of Information Act-related requests, and Petition for Alien Relative filings, among others.

Funds from the DILSF allowed LFSRM to maintain all staff, increase programming, and expand the types of services offered to Denver residents. LFSRM plans to hire a new attorney to work on cases under the Denver Relief Immigration Project, and to offer more complex forms of relief to both new and current clients.

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 cannot be overstated. The detention center has capacity for about 1,500 people; over 71% appear before immigration judges without a lawyer.

RMIAN serves people with incomes at or below 200% of the federal poverty guidelines. Last year, with support from the DILSF, RMIAN piloted Colorado's first universal representation model and hired two full-time attorneys. As of November, these attorneys had represented 32 Denver residents, including asylum-seekers, long-time lawful permanent residents, crime victims, Dreamers, and parents of U.S.-citizen children.

While half of the cases are pending, RMIAN's attorneys have secured the release of two detained clients. They also secured lawful permanent residency for two Denver residents. Without funding from DILSF, all of these individuals would have been forced to represent themselves in complex immigration proceedings.

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.

With DILSF funding, the Clinic represented nearly 50 individuals. Legal services included support for removal proceedings, a petition for review related to an already deported individual, representation in bond proceedings, and administrative support such as a visa petition for a qualifying relative, a petition for naturalization, and over a dozen DACA renewals.

In several cases, the Clinic secured the release of clients on bond, reuniting them with their families. In another case, the Clinic secured the release of a father and daughter arrested by ICE on deportation orders that were over a decade old.

The DILSF provided partial start-up funding for a Clinical Fellow within the clinic, as well as a postgraduate Immigration Detention Fellow at the Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network (RMIAN).



“Nancy” came to the United States from Mexico when she was a baby and grew up in Denver. She is a Lawful Permanent Resident, and her two children are U.S. citizens. She is a survivor of multiple instances of trauma and domestic violence. After a misdemeanor criminal infraction, Nancy was detained by immigration officials in Aurora. She couldn’t afford an attorney. “I didn’t have a lawyer, and I lost hope. I didn’t have a date that I would get out, or a bond, or a date when I was going to see a judge or a lawyer,” she recalls. “I kept thinking about my kids, and I knew I had to fight to stay here for them. But I felt lost and uninformed.” When Nancy received her lawyer through RMIAN, she “felt blessed.”

With the help of her attorney, Nancy obtained a low bond. She was released from detention and reunited with her children. She is grateful that the City of Denver “really cares about the people that need their help.”



In October 2019, a Denver resident came to LFSRM looking to reunite with her two sons. She was the benefactor of a Diversity Visa but was unable to bring her sons to the U.S. at the time. LFSRM assisted her in filing I-130 applications for her sons. Without DILSF funding, LFSRM would have had to turn this client away. With continued funding, LFSRM will be able to assist this client even beyond the I-130 stage to ensure that after the petitions are approved, she is able to reunite with her children.



A JAMLAC immigration attorney met with a social worker from the Denver Department of Human Services (DHS) who assists elderly people living in nursing homes. Denver DHS has legal guardianship over the clients because they do not have family who can support them. The social worker fights to ensure that her residents do not lose their medical coverage. If they do, they will no longer be able to live at the nursing home, which provides all of their living necessities through Medicaid/Medicare. Two of her clients’ residency cards expired. “Through the DILSF,” she says, “I was able to provide assistance to these two clients by renewing their Permanent Resident cards, so they can continue to live at the nursing home.”



“Marco” was brought to the United States at a young age and became a recipient of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). Due to his physical disabilities, he underwent approximately 12 surgeries in his childhood. As a young adult, Marco got into a relationship with someone who was physically aggressive, verbally abusive, and used Marco’s undocumented status as a tool of control. The abusive partner called the police multiple times on Marco, which eventually resulted in domestic violence-related convictions and landed Marco in ICE detention. Student attorneys at the Sturm College of Law Immigration Law & Policy Clinic represented Marco in bond proceedings, not only obtaining a much lower bond than expected but also helping him connect to legal resources once he returned home.

If you are interested in seeking out legal services from any of our nonprofit partners, please reach out to them directly as they all have specific eligibility criteria and types of cases they work on.

As a community foundation, The Denver Foundation relies on the generosity of donors to financially support our work. The need for support of our immigrant communities is more urgent than ever, as many in these communities — especially those facing detention in crowded facilities — face extreme vulnerability to the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis.

With additional resources, The Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund can expand services to address many unmet needs within the immigrant population across Metro Denver.

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 Philanthropic Services Group, 303.300.1790. Please visit denverfoundation.org and search “legal fund” to learn more and make a donation.

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 Philanthropic Services Group at 303.300.1790.

Please visit denverfoundation.org and search “legal fund” to make an online donation.



THE DENVER FOUNDATION

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