



PRESS RELEASE
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City and County of Denver
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City Launches Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund to Aid Immigrants in Removal Proceedings and DACA/DREAM Act Assistance

Mayor Hancock challenges business community to financially support the fund, Denver receives \$100,000 grant from Vera Institute SAFE Cities Network

DENVER – Mayor Michael B. Hancock, Denver City Council and members of the Denver community today launched the Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund to provide access to legal representation for qualified individuals threatened with or in removal proceedings and individuals seeking affirmative relief – including DACA or DREAM Act-related relief.

“Denver’s immigrant community plays a vital role in our city. This fund will further our ability to meet a core mission – to preserve and protect families and children living in Denver,” Mayor Hancock said. “We hold dear the values of inclusion, acceptance and opportunity, and this fund will promote due process and access to justice for vulnerable members of our community.”

“I strongly support the Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund,” said Federico Pena, former Denver Mayor, U.S. Secretary of Energy, and U.S. Secretary of Transportation. “Deportation proceedings are the only legal proceedings in the United States where people are detained without access to legal representation. The constitutional guarantee of due process applies to people residing in the U.S., including immigrants. Before we separate parents and children, before we remove someone who is a hard-working and valued member of our community, we must respect their rights.”

“The United States’ immigration system is broken and many undocumented immigrants are unaware of their rights or potential qualifications for legal status,” said Councilman Paul López, who has been central to the recent reforms. “Keeping families together and honoring the right to due process for all people are core values in our City. We stand proud in establishing the Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund to defend those values.”

“I strongly support the Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund,” said Robin Kniech, Denver City Councilwoman. “Recent policy announcements on immigration have threatened and disrupted our community. Many immigrants have legal claims to be present in the United States, but don’t have

access to a lawyer to understand their options or plead their case. These services are critical to protecting the city's interest in keeping families together and preventing unnecessary disruption to our local economy."

The Fund will launch with an initial \$385,000: \$200,000 from the City and County of Denver general fund; \$50,000 from the City and County of Denver Community Support Fund; \$5,000 from The Denver Foundation; \$30,000 from the Rose Community Foundation; and a newly announced \$100,000 catalyst grant from the Vera Institute [Safety & Fairness for Everyone \(SAFE\) Cities Network](#). Denver will also join the SAFE Cities Network, administered by the Vera Institute of Justice.

The Denver Foundation will administer the fund and will distribute grants to non-profit organizations providing direct legal representation to Denver residents for (1) defense of removal proceedings and, (2) for assistance with affirmative immigration relief. In addition, direct legal representation includes DACA or DREAM Act-related relief, Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), asylum, U visas and T visas, Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), and naturalization. Grants will also be awarded to build capacity to expand the network of pro bono and "low-bono" attorneys serving Denver's immigration clients, including law school clinics. The Denver Foundation will work with an advisory committee to determine which nonprofits will receive grants to provide services. The advisory committee includes the following individuals:

- Jamie Torres, Deputy Director of the Agency of Human Rights and Community Partnerships and Director of the Office of Immigrant & Refugee Affairs (appointed by the Mayor)
- Joy Athanasiou, Immigration Attorney (appointed by City Council)
- Nancy Elkin, Immigration Attorney (appointed by the Colorado Lawyers Committee)
- Miguel Oaxaca, Together Colorado Board Member and directly impacted community member (appointed by the Immigrant Resistance Table)
- Tania Valenzuela, AFSC CO Advisory Committee member and directly impacted community member (appointed by the Immigrant Resistance Table)
- Member appointed by The Denver Foundation
- Member appointed by the Fundraising Committee

"The Denver Foundation is honored to manage the Immigrant Legal Defense Fund and to support efforts to increase available legal representation to immigrants," says Christine Márquez-Hudson, President and CEO of The Denver Foundation. "We believe that legal status—and access to legal representation and due process—is a basic right and essential to successful integration. This program is important not only for the individuals directly affected, but for their families."

The Vera Institute will also provide technical assistance and support, including assistance in identifying and training legal service providers, providing opportunities to share best practices with other jurisdictions, and providing data collection and research support, with an eye toward evaluation.

"Ensuring everyone is afforded legal representation is a cornerstone of our country's justice system," said City Attorney Kristin Bronson. "Individuals dealing with removal proceedings deserve to have a fair hearing on their status. That means they need representation, and this fund will provide that."

The Fund will accept donations from private individuals, non-profit organizations and corporations. Donations to the fund are tax-deductible. To donate, [visit the Denver Foundation website](#).

The Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund was established by Mayor Hancock's Executive Order 142, which affirms Denver's commitment to stand with immigrants and refugees, and maintains Denver as a welcoming city where everyone can feel safe and thrive. City staff, community advocates, and immigration law experts developed recommendations regarding the governance structure and services to be provided by the Fund.

Committee members included the following individuals:

Executive committee:

- Alan Salazar, Chief of Staff
- Kristin Bronson, City Attorney
- Paul Lopez, City Councilman

Governance committee:

- Chair: Cristal Torres DeHerrera, Deputy City Attorney
- Celesté Martinez, Immigration Resistance Table, which includes: American Friends Services Committee-Colorado, Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition, Colorado People's Alliance, Mi Familia Vota, Padres y Jovenes Unidos, SEIU Local 105, and Together Colorado
- Christine Márquez Hudson, The Denver Foundation
- Denise Maes, American Civil Liberties Union of Colorado
- Janet Lopez, Rose Community Foundation
- Julie Gonzales, The Meyer Law Office, P.C.
- Mark Grueskin, Recht Korfeld, P. C.
- Mekela Goehring, Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network
- Rodolfo Rodríguez, City Council Aide to Councilwoman Robin Kniech

Scope of Services Committee:

- Co-Chair: Jamie Torres, Deputy Director for the City of Denver Agency for Human Rights and Community Partnerships and Director of the Office of Immigrant & Refugee Affairs
- Co-Chair: Lauren Schmidt, Director of Civil Litigation, City Attorney's Office
- Victoria Aguilar, City of Denver Department of Human Services, Protection and Prevention Programs and Denver Immigrant & Refugee Commission
- Tina Diaz, Immigration Director, Justice and Mercy Legal Aid Clinic
- Juan Gallegos, Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition
- César Cuauhtémoc García Hernández, University of Denver Law School
- Yessenia Guzman, Denver County Court
- Aaron Hall, Joseph Law Firm
- Brad Hendrick, Caplan and Earnest
- Diana Higuera, Denver Immigrant & Refugee Commission
- Eric Johnson, Immigration Attorney, Johnson Knudson, LLC
- Adriana Lara, City Council Aide to Councilman Paul Lopez
- Camila Palmer, Elkind Alterman Hatson, P.C.
- Jennifer Piper, American Friends Services Committee

The fund is one of several steps the city has already taken to protect our immigrants and refugees. Denver created its first-ever hate crimes penalty to send a clear message that bias-driven violence will

not be tolerated. The city also created a plea by mail system to encourage community members to comply with the law from the safety and security of their home. Finally, the city changed Denver's sentencing laws to ensure that the penalty reflects the severity of the crime and to limit deportation consequences for low level offenses.