

REPORT OF THE CHIEF LEGISLATIVE ANALYST

DATE: June 18, 2025

TO: Honorable Members of the Rules, Elections, and Intergovernmental Relations Committee

FROM: Sharon M. Tso 
Chief Legislative Analyst

Council File No.	25-0002-S48
Assignment No.	25-05-0458

SUBJECT: Resolution (Soto-Martínez – Price) to SUPPORT legislative and/or administrative action to increase funding for immigration legal services in California.

CLA RECOMMENDATION: Adopt Resolution (Soto-Martínez – Price) to include in the City’s 2025-2026 State Legislative Program, SUPPORT for any legislative and/or administrative action that would allocate \$60 million in additional funding for immigration legal services in California.

SUMMARY

Resolution (Soto-Martínez – Price), introduced on May 23, 2025, states that California has the largest immigration population in the nation, including 1.5 million immigrants that reside in Los Angeles. The Resolution further states that as a Sanctuary City, Los Angeles has supported and broadened protections for immigrants through legislative and budgetary actions. However, the federal administration continues to target the immigrant community through immigration enforcement raids, detentions, family separations, and deportations, while terminating programs that provide vital legal services to immigrants. The Resolution states that Governor Newsom’s May Revision maintains a \$75 million allocation to the California Department of Social Services for immigrant legal services programs, but it is insufficient in the context of the federal government’s attacks on the immigrant community and the increased demand for legal services. The Resolution states that members of the State Legislature and non-profit legal service providers have requested an additional \$60 million allocation to the Fiscal Year 2025-26 budget for immigrant legal services to meet the increased needs of undocumented minors, adults, and families facing deportation; counteract the termination of federally-funded immigration legal programs; expand legal representation for students and faculty at California State Universities and community colleges; and improve the quality of life for some of the City’s most vulnerable constituents. The Resolution therefore requests that the City support any legislative and/or administrative action that would allocate \$60 million in additional funding for immigration legal services in California.

BACKGROUND

The U.S. immigration court system recognizes the right to counsel, but does not provide immigrants the right to a court-appointed attorney for those who cannot pay for one, even for children. Since 2013, jurisdictions across the U.S. have allocated public funding for immigrant legal services to better support their immigrant residents. Publicly funded legal services for immigrants have varied widely, with some jurisdictions focusing exclusively on assistance to immigrants in removal proceedings and others providing holistic support through outreach, mental health and wellness programs, and assistance with affirmative legal benefits petitions.

Since 1999, the State has supported legal assistance for low-income Californians through funding allocations to the State Bar of California. In 2024, the State Bar's Equal Access Fund distributed more than \$31 million to nonprofit legal service providers to provide legal assistance to low-income California residents for civil law matters, such as housing discrimination, wage theft, and immigration. According to the State Bar, roughly \$8 million of the Fund was spent on immigrant legal services to assist 11,000 clients.

The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) also funds qualified nonprofit organizations to provide legal services to immigrants residing in or formerly residing in the State through the Immigration Services Funding program. The Immigration Services Funding program provides free, quality immigration legal services to individuals who cannot otherwise afford an attorney or legal representation. In 2022-2024, CDSS' Immigration Services Bureau provided \$36.8 million in funding to 85 nonprofit organizations to provide immigration legal services and benefits, education and outreach, legal training and assistance, and supportive services.

During a special session in December 2024, the State Legislature approved an additional allocation of \$10 million to the State Bar for immigrant legal services, but included a condition that the funds will not be used for "individuals with serious or violent felony convictions." A budget agreement advanced by the Legislature this week includes a similar condition and would restrict approximately \$40 million for deportation defense or other immigration legal help to immigrants convicted of any felony. While some State funds allocated for immigration legal services are already restricted to people with "serious or violent" felony convictions, the new language would apply to any felonies. Legal service providers state that that these could include property crimes, shoplifting, or the issuance of bad checks. The agreement is still subject to negotiation before the budget is approved.

California serves the greatest share of undocumented college students in the country, with the highest portion of those students attending one of the State's 116 community colleges. Across the University of California, California State University, and California Community College systems, Dream Resource Centers support the State's estimated 100,000 undocumented students and students from mixed-status families. Dream Center coordinators and their nonprofit legal partners said they have seen unprecedented demand for legal services from undocumented college students since November 2024, amid the termination of legal service programs for unaccompanied minors and Temporary Protected Status for various countries.

DEPARTMENTS NOTIFIED

Community Investment for Families Department


Susan Oh
Analyst

Attachment: Resolution (Soto-Martínez – Price)

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, any official position of the City of Los Angeles with respect to legislation, rules, regulations or policies proposed to or pending before a local, state or federal governmental body or agency must have first been adopted in the form of a Resolution by the City Council; and

WHEREAS, California has the largest immigrant population in the United States and 1.5 million immigrants live in the City of Los Angeles; and

WHEREAS, given the City's significant and essential immigrant population and its status as a Sanctuary City, Los Angeles has broadened protections for and supported its immigrant constituents through intentional legislative and budgetary actions; and

WHEREAS, the Trump administration continues to target the immigrant community through mass I.C.E. raids, detentions, family separations, and deportations while terminating vital programs that offer immigrants legal services; and

WHEREAS, California Governor Gavin Newsom has presented the May Revision, an annual update to the Governor's proposed budget with new information and proposals; and

WHEREAS, the Governor's May Revision proposes a *maintained* \$75 million allocation to state legal services programs through the California Department of Social Services for immigration supports; and

WHEREAS, while the state's maintenance of this annual allocation is a crucial action in support of immigrants - maintenance alone is insufficient in light of the unprecedented and vigorous nature of the federal attacks to the immigrant community that has swelled demand for immigration legal services; and


WHEREAS, multiple members of the state legislature and non-profit legal service providers propose that an additional \$60 million be allocated to the Fiscal Year 2025-26 state budget to more appropriately meet the increased volume of need; and

WHEREAS, this additional allocation would enable legal service providers to expand supports to unaccompanied undocumented minors, youth, adults, and families facing deportation, counteract the federal termination of immigration-related free legal programs, invest in assistance with naturalization applications, and expand legal representation for students and faculty at CSU campuses and community colleges; and

WHEREAS, this budgetary expansion at the state level would not only aid the City's undocumented and immigrant community through broadened legal support and representation, but would also tangibly improve the quality of life by ameliorating fears of deportation, family separation, trauma, and economic destabilization that disproportionately impacts some of the City's most vulnerable constituents; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that by adoption of this Resolution, the City of Los Angeles hereby includes in its 2025-26 State Legislative Program, support for a \$60 million increase in state funding for immigration legal services.

PRESENTED BY:


HUGO SOTO-MARTÍNEZ
Councilmember, 13th District

SECONDED BY:



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