

## **Communication from Public**

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**Council File No:** 17-0046-S2

**Comments for Public Posting:** Public comment is attached in the PDF file.



*Submitted online to the Office of the City Clerk for Los Angeles City Council*

Re: [Item #5, Council File 17-0046-S2](#)

August 18, 2020

Dear Los Angeles City Council,

On behalf of OneJustice, we are writing to express our full support for, and urge you to approve, item #5 to ensure that the Los Angeles Justice Fund (LAJF) program can continue for current and new cases in the City of Los Angeles. We urge you to approve this item, including supporting language to ensure the increased flexibility to serve all eligible cases, current and new. It is urgent to invest in sustainable and comprehensive funding for the LA Justice Fund so immigrants and asylum seekers in Los Angeles can have access to free legal counsel when facing detention and deportation.

OneJustice is a legal nonprofit organization in California that brings life-changing legal assistance to people in need by transforming the civil legal aid system. We are committed to increasing access to justice for all, including immigrants and asylum seekers, by partnering with nonprofit organizations, law schools, and law firms to implement innovative pro bono programs in Los Angeles and throughout California.

OneJustice was a grantee organization of the Los Angeles Justice Fund and had the opportunity to collaborate with nonprofit organizations, law schools, and law firms to increase the capacity of pro bono legal services for immigrants facing deportation in Los Angeles. We deeply understand the life-saving impacts of mobilizing attorneys from the public and private sectors to provide emergency pro bono legal support to immigrant communities impacted by the Muslim Travel Ban, increased immigration enforcement, and unjust and racist policies targeting immigrant communities.

In Los Angeles, over 100,000 individuals in removal proceedings do not have an attorney<sup>1</sup>, exposing them to routine due process violations. The need for legal representation in removal proceedings is increasing exponentially in Los Angeles and all over the country. Access to legal counsel for immigrants facing deportation is essential in order to have a fair day in court. No child, adult, or family should be forced to go to immigration court alone. There is generally no recognized right to government-appointed counsel in civil immigration proceedings even though deportation can result in imminent harm or death.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://trac.syr.edu/phptools/immigration/nta/>



A three-year study has shown that 68 percent of detained immigrants in California are unrepresented. The same data shows that detained immigrants who had counsel succeeded in challenging their deportation more than five times as often as did their unrepresented counterparts. Non-detained immigrants who had access to legal representation were four times more likely to win their case than those who were unrepresented.<sup>2</sup> We have seen first-hand how vital it is to provide free legal assistance to immigrants in Los Angeles who are navigating a rapidly changing legal system without an attorney.

With nearly 3.5 million immigrants living in Los Angeles and growing numbers of COVID-19 positive cases in immigration detention centers in California, including the Adelanto Detention Center where most Los Angeles residents are transferred to, it is imperative that the Los Angeles City Council approve funding for the Los Angeles Justice Fund with no restrictions on taking on new cases.

Currently, detention and deportation can turn into a death sentence during the COVID-19 pandemic. LAJF attorneys continue doing the work to protect immigrant communities from the dangerous and life-threatening conditions of detention and deportation. Tens of thousands of immigrants are being detained around the country in conditions where they have inadequate access to testing, protective equipment, hygiene products, and basic medical care. As COVID-19 rages on, the Los Angeles City Council must not deny legal representation to new cases.

It is important to note that the Los Angeles Justice Fund program has been critical in responding to protect immigrant communities in Los Angeles who are impacted by the draconian and inhumane policies of the Trump Administration. The CAO and the independent evaluation team by the Vera Institute of Justice reported that the Los Angeles Justice Fund program exceeded expectations and demonstrated that there is still a critical need for this program to protect immigrant communities in Los Angeles. It is abundantly clear that we need the Los Angeles Justice Fund program renewed at its full level of \$1 million to ensure a just recovery for all Angelenos, protect immigrant communities from the administration's xenophobic and racist policies and laws, and to ensure due process rights are protected for all asylum seekers and immigrants.

The Los Angeles Justice Fund has reunited hundreds of families and provides legal defense to immigrant and asylum seekers in Los Angeles facing the life-threatening impacts of detention and deportation. We write to respectfully urge your support for the funding allocated for the Los

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<sup>2</sup> <https://law.yale.edu/system/files/area/center/liman/document/access-to-counsel-calif-coalition-report-2016-06.pdf>



Angeles Justice Fund to ensure the protection of immigrant communities in Los Angeles. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

/s/ Bruno Huizar  
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/s/ Ariella Morrison  
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