

Communication from Public

Name: Maria Jose Vides

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Council File No: 17-0046-S2

Comments for Public Posting: Originally submitted on 11/30/21 under file number 17-0046. On behalf of CHIRLA, I am writing to urge the Immigrant Affairs, Civil Rights, and Equity Committee to adopt the following program recommendations outlined in the CLA's report: Option 1A: Adopt the proposed Immigrant Legal Services framework, in partnership with LA County, CCF, and Weingart, and instruct the CAO and CLA to report on the transfer of existing LAJF cases to the new program. Option 2B: Authorize city funds allocated in the FY2021-22 Adopted Budget to be used for financing existing LAJF cases and new cases under the new Immigrant Legal Services framework. Option 3B: Adopt a merit-blind approach where criminal history is not considered as eligibility criteria for participating in the new program. Please see attached document for full letter.



CHIRLA
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Immigrant Rights

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November 29th, 2021

The Honorable Kevin de Leon
Chair, Immigrant Affairs, Civil Rights, and Equity Committee
Los Angeles City Council
200 N Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA, 90012

SENT ELECTRONICALLY

RE: Recommendations for Los Angeles Justice Fund Phase II for Immigration Services

Founded in 1986 the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA) is a California leader, with national impact, made up of diverse immigrant families and individuals who act as agents of social change to achieve a world with freedom of mobility, full human rights, and true participatory democracy, fully inclusive of refugees and immigrants. CHIRLA prides itself in our work to serve the immigrant community through civic engagement, community education, organizing, advocacy at the forefronts of local, state, and federal government, and the provision of legal immigration services including citizenship assistance, DACA renewals, family reunifications, low-cost consultations, and removal defense.

On behalf of CHIRLA, I am writing to urge the Immigrant Affairs, Civil Rights, and Equity Committee to adopt the following program recommendations outlined in the CLA’s report:

Option 1A: Adopt the proposed Immigrant Legal Services framework, in partnership with LA County, CCF, and Weingart, and instruct the CAO and CLA to report on the transfer of existing LAJF cases to the new program.

Option 2B: Authorize city funds allocated in the FY 2021-22 Adopted Budget to be used for

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financing existing LAJF cases and new cases under the new Immigrant Legal Services framework.

Option 3B: Adopt a merit-blind approach where criminal history is not considered as eligibility criteria for participating in the new program.

Since its launch in 2017, the LAJF pilot program demonstrated the power of a public-private partnership to expand the safety net available to the one-third of Angelenos who identify as immigrants. According to an analysis by the USC Dornsife Equity Research Institute, as of January 2021 LAJF grantees reported at least 2,047 legal screenings and provided representation to 568 cases throughout L.A. City and County. Additionally, several evaluations and analyses show that LAJF has been critical to the building and strengthening the legal services and removal defense infrastructure across the City and County of Los Angeles. The LAJF pilot program far exceeded its initial goals of bolstering existing removal defense efforts, increasing capacity, and enhancing and expanding access to legal services. Through March 31, 2020, LAJF provided legal representation that resulted in 62% positive outcomes, compared to only 23% of immigrants without counsel nationally who were able to obtain immigration relief.¹

Moreover, in its capacity as a LAJF pilot grantee, CHIRLA provided direct representation to clients in removal proceedings and was an active participant in the LA Justice Fund coalition from 2017 to 2021—regularly communicating, coordinating, and advancing advocacy items along with other grantees and partners. CHIRLA strongly supports recommendations from the Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees (GCIR) for the next phase of the LA Justice Fund to offer affirmative immigration relief benefits, such as assistance with DACA application renewals and immigration status changes; and that the program include a referral system for wraparound services, including housing, food security, and health services as needed. Additionally, we support the recommendation to engage a Community Advisory Group to increase equitable access to services and set strategic priorities for the LA Justice

¹ American Immigration Council.

<https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/access-counsel-immigration-court>





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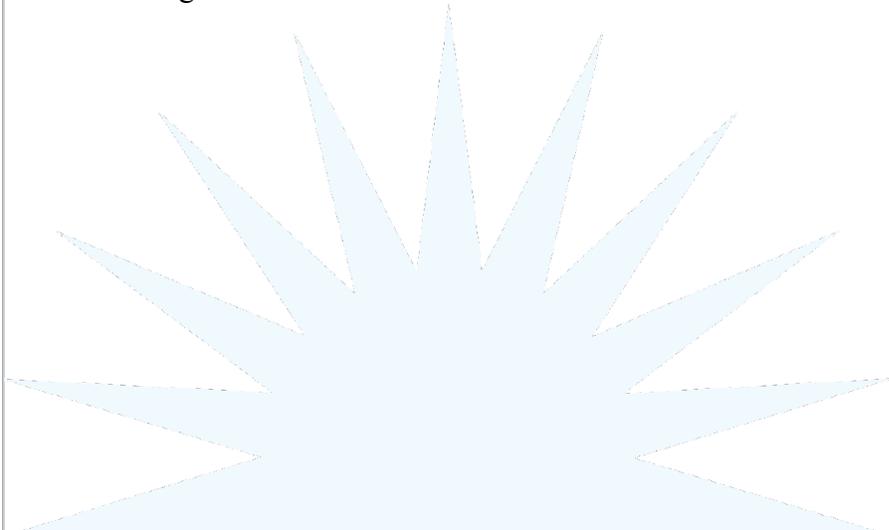
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Fund network.

Everyone at risk of deportation deserves a fair day in court even if they cannot afford an attorney. Defense from deportation and access to affirmative legal services are critical to universal representation, which has strong public support. A recent national poll conducted by the Vera Institute found that approximately 87% of people in the United States support government-funded attorneys for people in immigration court and proceedings. This is consistent with the premise that justice demands everyone is treated with basic fairness. Justice and dignity for immigrants is fundamental to criminal justice reform, meaning that the City's commitment must be two-fold.

Furthermore, we note that immigrants are too often held to rigid standards that do not apply to U.S. born citizens in criminal and immigration courts. The over-policing and racial profiling of immigrant communities funnels immigrants directly into the criminal justice system. Currently, the list of "aggravated felonies" encompasses over 30 types of offenses, including failing to appear in court. Although robust evidence suggests that immigrants are less likely to commit crimes than their U.S.-born counterparts, both misdemeanors and "aggravated felonies" can trigger deportation for immigrants. Non-citizens convicted of an "aggravated felony" face some of the harshest outcomes in court., as quoted by the Supreme Court. Yet, U.S. policymakers continue to draft and enact policies that criminalize non-citizens.

We urge the City to work in partnership with the County and philanthropic partners to support sustainable and expanded funding for universal representation for individuals and families dealing with deportation and removal proceedings in Los Angeles County, as well as wrap-around services. Jurisdictions across the country have already moved forward sustained and expanded funding for deportation defense for FY21. For example, the cities of Long Beach and Denver increased funding for universal representation programs by 300%, [New Jersey doubled capacity](#) of their state program, and Harris County in Texas passed [\\$2 million](#) in funding for immigrant legal services. 21 cities in Vera's [SAFE Initiative](#) have expanded or sustained funding for FY 21. It is time for our County and City to join those local governments.





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CHIRLA respectfully urges the City of Los Angeles Council, the Immigrant Affairs, Civil Rights, and Equity Committee, and the Budget and Finance Committee to build on their commitment to immigrant communities by funding a universal representation model (as outlined in the CLA report under Option 1A, Option 2B, and Option 3B) that engages the realities of those navigating the intersections of complex bureaucratic immigration processes and the legacy of systemic racism and xenophobia within the criminal justice system. We applaud your leadership in uplifting the intersectional needs of immigrant communities.

Should you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact Maria Jose Vides at mvides@chirla.org and Esperanza Guevara at eguevara@chirla.org.

Respectfully,

Esperanza A. Guevara

Esperanza A. Guevara
Deputy Director, Policy and Advocacy

Maria Jose Vides

Maria Jose Vides
Regional Policy Advocate

CC:
Office of the Chief Legislative Analyst, Los Angeles City Council
Los Angeles Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs
Los Angeles City Council

