

March 9, 2018

Dear Speaker Heastie, Senator Flanagan, and Senator Klein,

On behalf of 70 legal service providers and community based organizations serving immigrants in New York State, **we write to urge you to renew and increase funding for the Liberty Defense Project (LDP) first created last year to \$20 million.** The LDP was launched in 2017 as a truly groundbreaking program that is allowing New York State to fight back against unduly damaging immigration policies coming out of the White House. The heart of the LDP is legal defense funding, ensuring that those who are eligible for relief under our current laws are able to access community education and lawyers, all across New York State.

It is imperative that LDP funding be renewed in order to meet the goals, announced by the Governor and the Legislature last year: to redress the inequalities of the immigration legal system and ensure that all New Yorkers have the ability to access justice in an impartial way. We were disappointed that the Executive Budget for FY 2019 included no renewed funding for this critical program. While contracting delays have slowed the disbursement of funds to grantees, most organizations have moved forward with the work, often advancing the funds to ensure that these necessary services get out to the communities through re-grants to other organizations around the State. With no renewed or expanded funding, the progress the LDP has made in its first year will be stopped in its tracks and hundreds of New Yorkers will be left without the critical legal representation they need.

In a recently released report by the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC) and the Immigrant Advocates Resource Collaborative (I-ARC), *"No Safe Harbor: Challenges in Obtaining Immigration Legal Services in New York"* available at www.nyic.org/nosafeharbor, New York's immigration legal services providers pointed to the lack of overall, flexible funding as a main reason why they are unable to increase rates of immigration legal representation in New York State. Moreover, they noted the changes in the immigration legal profession as a result of the harsh policies coming from Washington as an additional stressor on providers, with cases requiring significantly more attorney time across the board and the need for attorneys to handle "Know Your Rights" and crisis response on a near-constant basis. The LDP directly addressed and can continue to address these top concerns by allowing for the robust funding necessary to carry out quality and sustainable legal services, while also bolstering the capacity of community based organizations to support with "Know Your Rights" education and crisis response.

Not renewing the funds could have a devastating impact. To meet the programmatic goals, LDP grantees had to risk hiring additional staff to handle the increased caseloads based on assurances from Albany that New York State was committed to the initiative and would continue to fund these positions. In addition, because most immigration cases take one to four years to resolve on average, immigrants receiving services through the LDP will need access to their attorneys for the length of time of their cases. Not renewing the funding would, in essence, force LDP grantees to lay off the hires they have made and would mean that immigrants would lose lawyers midway through their cases.

Additionally, while current LDP grantees have re-granted a significant portion of funds to allow a greater distribution of the services across New York State, the need is still far from being met. We ask that an additional \$8 million be included in overall funding, and distributed in a competitive

bidding process. This will allow for transparency in how funds are allocated and ensure that they go to the neediest communities.

Consequently, we are requesting the following:

- Renewing the initial 2017 investment, which stands at **\$12 million**:
 - The original \$10 million included in the budget,
 - \$1 million in additional funding for Catholic Charities, which the Governor originally raised through private philanthropy and which funds a statewide project to capitalize on pro bono legal services;
 - Restore the New York Immigration Coalition's (NYIC) funding to \$1 million;
 - Provide \$1 million to Asian American Federation to service the Asian community, which was originally left out of last year's funding but was eventually allocated \$300,000 from the NYIC's budget line and an additional \$300,000 from Department of State funds.
- Include an additional \$8 million to be allocated through a competitive bidding process to allow organizations around the state to meet the needs of their communities in a transparent manner.

The support provided by the LDP is crucial to easing the burden faced by those serving immigrant communities, but in order to do so effectively, advocates and community-based organizations require a stable source of funding.

Sincerely,

The New York Immigration Coalition
ACCESS of WNY
African Communities Together
African Services Committee
AILA New York Chapter
All Souls Unitarian Universal Church
Arab American Association of New York
Asian American Federation
Atlas DIY
Brooklyn Defender Services
Cabrini Immigrant Services
Cabrini Immigrant Services of NYC
CAIR-NY
Catholic Charities Community Services, New York
Catholic Charities Tompkin (Tioga)
Catholic Migration Services
CDWBA Legal Project, Inc.
Center for Safety and Change
Center for the Integration and Advancement of New Americans (CIANA)
Central American Refugee Center (CARECEN)
Central Baptist Church
Chinese Progressive Association
City Bar Justice Center
Community Justice Clinic, University at Buffalo School of Law
Community Legal Advocates of New York

Community Resource Center
Dejus Center Inc.
Emerald Isle Immigration Center
Empire Justice Center
Erie County Bar Association Volunteer Lawyers Project, Inc. (VLP)
Faith In New York
First Unitarian Church of Rochester
Frank H. Hiscock Legal Aid Society
FWD.us
Greater New York Labor Religion Coalition
Greater Rochester Coalition for Immigration Justice
Human Rights First
Immigrant Defense Project
Immigrant Justice Corps
Immigration Equality
Independent Drivers Guild
Journey's End Refugee Services
Justice for Migrant Families
Kids for College
Long Island Jobs with Justice
Masa
MinKwon Center for Community Action
My Sisters' Place, Inc.
Neighbors Link
OCA - WHV
Presbytery of WNY
Rochester Greenlight Coalition
Rochester Tapid Response Network
RSHM LIFE Center
Rural and Migrant ministry
Russian-speaking Community Council of Manhattan and the Bronx, Inc.
Safe Horizon Immigration Law Project
Safe Passage
Sanctuary for Families
Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester Justice Office
The Bronx Defenders
The Legal Aid Society of Rochester, NY
The Legal Project
Tompkins County Immigrant Rights Coalition
UnLocal, Inc.
Volunteer Lawyers Project of Onondaga County
Volunteer Legal Services Project of Monroe County
Wayne Action for Racial Equality
Worker Justice Center of New York, Inc.
Workers' Center of Central NY