



February 20, 2020

The Honorable Helene E. Weinstein
Chair, Standing Committee on Ways and Means
LOB923, Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12248
wamchair@nyassembly.gov

The Honorable Liz Krueger
Chair, Standing Finance Committee
Room 416, CAP, Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12247
financechair@nysenate.gov

**Make the Road New York Testimony in Support of the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project
Submitted to the Legislative Budget Hearings on Local Government and Public Protection**

Dear Chairperson Weinstein and Chairperson Krueger,

Make the Road New York (MRNY) is a non-profit community-based membership organization with over 24,000 members dedicated to building the power of immigrant and working class communities to achieve dignity and justice. We operate community centers in Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, Long Island, and Westchester. Our model integrates legal and survival services, transformative education, community organizing, and policy innovation to make concrete changes that millions of families feel every day.

This federal administration's attacks on immigrant communities have been unrelenting, including through a marked increase in the number and violence of ICE raids that devastate and destabilize our communities. Nationwide, approximately half a million people were booked into detention in FY19 – a 58% increase from FY17.¹ Make the Road is representing a client who was tased over half a dozen times by ICE agents and whose partner's son was shot in the face on the street in front of their home right here in New York.²

Because our membership reach is wide, and because our offices are embedded in immigrant communities, we see the effects of ICE raids on our communities firsthand, as more and more loved ones of those detained by ICE walk through our doors seeking support. These are moments of crisis and acute vulnerability for families.

¹ U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, "U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Fiscal Year 2019 Enforcement and Removal Operations Report" (2019), available at <https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Document/2019/eroReportFY2019.pdf>.

² Wes Parnell, Rocco Parascandola, Thomas Tracy, and Larry McShane, "ICE agents, while arresting undocumented Mexican immigrant, wind up shooting second man in wild Brooklyn street brawl," New York Daily News (Feb. 6, 2020), available at <https://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/nyc-crime/ny-ice-agent-shoots-man-in-face-in-brooklyn-20200206-7db5cmlbqff2hflbs5pnssipuu-story.html>.

BROOKLYN
301 GROVE STREET
BROOKLYN, NY 11237
718 418 7690

QUEENS
92-10 ROOSEVELT AVENUE
JACKSON HEIGHTS, NY 11372
718 565 8500

STATEN ISLAND
161 PORT RICHMOND AVENUE
STATEN ISLAND, NY 10302
718 727 1222

LONG ISLAND
1090 SUFFOLK AVENUE
BRENTWOOD, NY 11717
631 231 2220

WESTCHESTER
46 WALLER AVENUE
WHITE PLAINS, NY 10605
914 948 8466

Not only are families emotionally traumatized by the sudden loss of a loved one, they also carry the heavy weight of not knowing what comes next, what their options to fight for their loved one to remain in the United States might be, and for many, how they will continue paying rent and putting food on the table after the loss of a primary breadwinner.

In these critical moments, MRNY organizers and lawyers team up to provide necessary support to families. We assist dozens of individuals a month impacted by ICE raids. For us, the first step is always assessing whether a detained loved one is eligible for the high-quality and free legal representation provided by the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP), and if eligible, providing them information about this crucial and life-saving resource. A significant portion of families we assist will qualify for this program. Knowing that their loved one will have access to a free, high-quality lawyer who will give them the best chance to get out of detention and remain in the United States removes a heavy load off a family's shoulders. It also prevents fraud and stabilizes families while preserving local resources, as families are less likely to experience housing and food insecurity if their loved ones are home.

This is not only true for the NYIFUP program funded by New York City, but also the upstate NYIFUP program funded by New York State. Below are two recent examples of how upstate NYIFUP has been critical for families who have come through our doors:

- In early January 2020, a young couple from Staten Island went upstate to visit family. They went on an errand to a Walmart and their GPS took them on a route into Canada and they accidentally crossed the border. Upon re-entry, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) detained one of them. To this day, he is being held at the Buffalo Detention Center in Batavia. This Staten Island man has lived in the United States for nearly twenty years, since he was six years old. His mother and grandmother walked into MRNY's Staten Island office, desperate for assistance. MRNY connected the family to legal representation through the Volunteer Lawyers Project (an upstate NYIFUP provider). One of our organizers continues to support the family.
- In October 2019, a community member living in Queens was working a short-term job at a factory in the Buffalo area. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) detained him and several other workers while they were leaving work. A loved one came to our Queens office seeking help. We connected the detained person to legal counsel through the Volunteer Lawyers Project. Through their legal representation, the Queens community member was able to leave detention quickly, and in time for a scheduled surgery.

This important network of providers, made truly effective because of the funding and support by the state, allows organizations like MRNY to strategically allocate resources to support families that seek out assistance. Because NYIFUP exists, we have been able to dedicate our resources to helping individuals with other unique and pressing issues, such as past orders of removal because they were unaware of a court date. MRNY also continues to provide ongoing know your rights presentations to community members about their rights when interacting with ICE agents, what to do after an immigration arrest, and how they can fight for a detained community member to be released from detention and remain in the United States using the Deportation Defense Manual³ developed by MRNY organizers and lawyers. Community education about NYIFUP is an important piece.

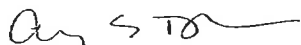
MRNY has long known that high-quality, free legal representation is key for immigrant families fighting detention and deportation. We advocated for and won: 1) a NYIFUP pilot program funded by the New York City Council; 2) funding to expand the NYIFUP program to everyone fighting their immigration case in the detained immigration court in Manhattan who could not afford a lawyer; and 3) funding to expand NYIFUP to all of New York State.

Now, we urge you to restore and increase your investment in giving immigrant New Yorkers their best chance to remain with their families and communities. This investment is necessary now, more than ever, in light of ever-increasing and inhumane immigration enforcement. Specifically, we urge you to fund immigrant legal services under the Liberty Defense Project (LDP) at \$15.3 million, which would allow \$6.5 million to be allocated to NYIFUP in FY21.

³ <https://immigrantdefensemanual.org/>

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Amy Taylor in black ink.

Amy Taylor
Co-Director, Legal Team

Handwritten signature of Yaritza Mendez in blue ink.

Yaritza Mendez
Associate Director, Organizing Team

