



New York State Legislature

Joint Legislative Budget Hearing - Public Protection

**Testimony in Support of Increased Immigration Legal Services Funding
Submitted by the New York Immigration Coalition**

February 12, 2026

My name is Dave Basnet, I am the Senior Manager of Immigrant Rights at the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC), a coalition of more than 200 immigrant and refugee organizations advancing access to public services, inclusion, and justice. We unite immigrants, members, and allies to build power so all New Yorkers can thrive.

For years, advocates—like my colleagues testifying here today and submitting in solidarity—have tirelessly called for robust, sustained funding to ensure New York has the necessary mechanisms and infrastructure to protect all residents, regardless of immigration status. Further, the need for laws that prohibit collusion between federal actors and local law enforcement is not new. We have long warned that without sufficient investment, and comprehensive legislation, immigrant New Yorkers would be left exposed to unjust arrest, detention, and deportation.

The NYIC is an organizational lead of the **New York for All (NY4All)** Campaign and the **Campaign for Access, Representation, and Equity (CARE) for Immigrant Families**. Together, these campaigns represent a broad statewide alliance of community based organizations, legal service providers, immigrant rights groups, faith-based groups, unions, and advocates. Both individually, and across these coalitions, we have consistently underscored the urgent need to ensure access to immigration legal representation and to permanently end harmful collaboration between federal immigration authorities and local law enforcement. This year, we urge the Legislature to advance a comprehensive funding and policy framework that both expands legal protections for immigrant New Yorkers and strengthens community trust.

Accordingly, the NYIC calls for a **\$175 million** investment in immigration legal services in the FY27 Enacted Budget and urges passage of the **Access to Representation Act (ARA, [A.270/S.141](#))**, the **Building Up Immigrant Legal Defense (BUILD, [A.2689/ S.4538](#)) Act.**, and the **New York for All Act ([A.3506/S.2235](#))**. Together, these investments and reforms would establish a right to counsel, end collusion with federal immigration enforcement, and provide critical, life-saving legal support to immigrant families statewide.

The Access to Representation Act and Building Up Immigrant Legal Defense Act

The Trump Administration's mass deportation and detention agenda has expanded indiscriminate enforcement actions that sow fear, destabilize communities, and threaten the



well-being of immigrant families across New York. The state must act decisively by ensuring universal access to competent legal representation for people facing deportation. Immigrants risk permanent family separation and return to dangerous conditions abroad, yet there is no guaranteed right to counsel for those who cannot afford an attorney. As of December 2025, [more than 91,000 people](#) in New York are navigating immigration court without legal representation. Data underscores the urgency: detained immigrants with counsel are up to [10.5 times](#) more likely to prevail in their cases than those without representation. These figures reflect an immediate need for intervention.

NYIC calls for a **\$175 million investment in the FY27 Budget** to provide urgent and long-term support for immigrant families in New York. This funding should be allocated as follows:

- **\$85 million** to sustain existing legal and social services programs, fund recruitment and retention initiatives, and ensure equitable compensation;
- **\$50 million** for for new emergency deportation defense (legal and social services); and
- **\$40 million** for capacity-building and infrastructure investments to expand the pipeline of immigration legal professionals entering the field and strengthen service provider infrastructure to support the scaling up of services.

Now more than ever, New York must act to significantly expand and stabilize critical immigration legal services. Sustained investment in legal representation is essential not only to protect immigrant families from detention and deportation, but also to preserve family unity, promote public safety, and uphold due process amid escalating federal enforcement actions. Legal counsel remains one of the most effective tools to prevent unjust outcomes, maintain community stability, and affirm New York’s longstanding commitment to equity and inclusion.

We also urge the Legislature to pass the **Access to Representation Act (ARA, [A.270/S.141](#))** and the **Building Up Immigrant Legal Defense (BUILD, [A.2689/ S.4538](#)) Act**.

The **ARA** would establish a statutory right to counsel for immigrants facing deportation in New York and create stable, sustainable funding for legal service providers to meet the urgent need. By guaranteeing representation regardless of ability to pay, the ARA would ensure that no one is forced to face a trained government attorney alone. This measure would strengthen due process protections and help families remain together.

The **BUILD Act** lays the foundation for the ARA by investing in the infrastructure legal service providers need to protect immigrant communities over the next four years. It establishes a dedicated, multi-year funding stream to support training, holistic services, and local and regional coordination. By strengthening provider capacity, the BUILD Act ensures that legal



programs can respond effectively to current enforcement pressures while building long-term, sustainable systems to protect the rights of immigrant New Yorkers statewide.

Federal immigration policies are undermining New York’s safety and stability by separating families, subjecting immigrants and people of color to discriminatory enforcement, and detaining individuals in harmful and inhumane conditions. Since May, ICE has increasingly detained people at immigration court hearings—often targeting those without legal counsel—as enforcement policies shift rapidly and without notice. Amid record-high detention levels, access to legal representation is essential to prevent unnecessary and punitive detention. The consequences extend far beyond those detained: [one in three New York children has an immigrant parent](#), and detention inflicts lasting harm on families and communities statewide.

State action is therefore critical to counter the Trump administration’s expanded deportation dragnet and the systematic dismantling of federal protections for immigrants. The federal government has begun terminating long-standing, federally funded legal access programs serving people in detention, unaccompanied children, individuals deemed mentally incompetent, and families reunified after separation during the first Trump administration. A \$175 million investment in the FY27 budget would ensure that every region of the state can provide life-saving legal services that protect against inhumane detention, family separation, and permanent displacement. This investment is also essential to New York’s economic strength and long-standing leadership. [Immigrants in New York](#) make up more than a quarter of the state’s workforce, include over 280,000 entrepreneurs sustaining local economies, and contribute more than \$31 billion annually in state and local taxes.

New York State must expand the legacy that began with NYC’s groundbreaking New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP), which was the first publicly-funded deportation defense program in the country. Since then, over 50 jurisdictions have followed suit and established and funded their own programs because of New York City’s success. It is imperative that we lead the way again and stand up for immigrant New Yorkers. The State of New York must act now, at a scale that meets the need, to ensure immigrant New Yorkers can remain safe, supported, and able to thrive in their homes, workplaces, and communities.

The New York for All Act

We also urge the Legislature to pass the **New York for All Act** ([A.3506/S.2235](#)) immediately.

Across the country, federal immigration enforcement has escalated dramatically, with agents employing militarized tactics that terrorize families, traumatize children, destabilize entire communities, and have used deadly force. This escalation is backed by unprecedented federal investment: President Trump’s so-called “One Big Beautiful Bill Act” injected \$170 billion into immigration enforcement, guaranteeing that these aggressive and harmful practices will



intensify. Recent enforcement actions and [resulting deaths](#) in Minneapolis serve as a stark warning of the consequences of unchecked federal enforcement for immigrant communities nationwide, including here in New York.

ICE enforcement practices disproportionately target Black and Brown communities and undermine basic principles of dignity and due process for all residents, regardless of immigration status. Policies that entangle state and local institutions in civil immigration enforcement erode public trust, discourage cooperation with law enforcement, and ultimately make communities less safe. New York must reject approaches that criminalize immigrant communities and instead advance proven public safety policies that promote trust, accountability, and clear limits on government power.

The **New York for All Act** establishes clear, commonsense boundaries between state and local authorities and an increasingly lawless federal immigration enforcement regime. The bill broadly prohibits the use of state and local government resources for civil immigration enforcement, ensuring that immigrant New Yorkers and their families can safely and confidently interact with community institutions such as schools, courts, hospitals, and other essential institutions, without fear of arrest or deportation. Limiting collusion—as other states have done—can meaningfully reduce the number of New Yorkers swept into an ever-expanding deportation dragnet that relies on local cooperation. We can, and must, refuse to be complicit in ICE abuses and cruelty towards our immigrant neighbors.

While Governor Hochul's Executive Budget Proposal includes Article VII language related to protecting sensitive locations from federal immigration enforcement activity, the proposal does not protect New York residents from the scourge of constitutional violations, heavy-handed abuses, and government sanctioned-violence carried out by ICE under the current federal Administration. **New York for All is the comprehensive legislative solution** needed to confront these harms by regulating information-sharing, restricting reliance on ICE administrative warrants, and preventing the expansion of 287(g) agreements. By replacing a confusing and uneven patchwork of local policies with clear statewide standards, New York for All would protect family unity, uphold public safety, and ensure that state and local resources are used to serve New York priorities—not federal deportation agendas.

We thank you Chair Pretlow and Chair Krueger for convening this important hearing. The importance of New York's leadership in upholding freedom, fairness, and family unity cannot be overstated. We strongly urge both bodies to pass the **New York for All Act** ([A.3506/S.2235](#)) without delay and urge your leadership to make its passage a top priority, so that all New Yorkers can thrive safely at home, in their jobs, and with their families.



In closing, it is clear that there has never been a more critical moment for our state to increase funding for immigration legal services as the federal government continues dismantling due process and violating human rights through an aggressive mass detention and deportation agenda. Investing in immigration legal services is both a moral imperative and an economic and public safety necessity. When immigrants have legal representation, they are more likely to win their cases, remain with their families, and contribute to their communities. Moreover, legal representation reduces the burden on the state's social services by preventing unnecessary detentions and deportations that tear families apart and disrupt local economies.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Submitted by:

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