



PRESS RELEASE

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Leading Local and National Groups Announce Launch of First-in-the-Nation Public Defender System for New York's Immigrant Families

New York, New York, November 7, 2013--Now, for the first time in the United States, detained immigrants who cannot afford attorneys of their own will be provided with court-appointed deportation defense counsel through the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP). Funded through the New York City Council, this first-in-the-nation pilot program, will operate at the Varick Street Immigration Court in New York City. The pilot program will provide legal representation for New Yorkers who are detained and at risk of permanent exile from their families and the communities they call home.

The pilot program emerged from research conducted by the New York Immigrant Representation Study working group, a committee convened by Judge Robert A. Katzmann, Chief Judge of the Second Circuit Court of Appeals. This research demonstrated that approximately 60% of New Yorkers facing deportation at the Varick Street Immigration Court had no attorneys whatsoever, and, as a result, they had virtually no chance (3%) of stopping their deportation. Attorneys can increase these New Yorkers' chances of remaining here with their families by as much as 1000%. Reflecting on the launch of the program, Judge Katzmann observed "The New York Immigrant Family Unity Project is an historic commitment of local government support for counsel for immigrants and represents the joining together of local and federal governments, and concerned interests and organizations outside of government, to help address a crisis of tragic dimension." He added "The NYIFUP demonstrates how even those who might be adversaries in court come together around core values we all share: safeguarding the integrity, fairness, and efficiency of our system of justice which depends on adequate and effective counsel."

The NYIFUP is the result of advocacy by the [Center for Popular Democracy](#), the [Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant Rights](#) and [Make the Road New York](#) with crucial research support from the [Kathryn O. Greenberg Immigration Justice Clinic at Cardozo School of Law](#) and the [Vera Institute of Justice](#). "NYIFUP is precisely the type of investment that cities and states nationwide should be making at this moment. The program will help to keep New York families whole and will strengthen Empire State communities and our economy in the process," said Brittany Saunders,



Senior Staff Attorney for Immigrant Rights and Racial Justice at the Center for Popular Democracy. “We’re excited to see this program expanded statewide and beyond.”

Angela Fernandez, Executive Director of Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant Rights noted that the newly-launched program will help to meet the demand for quality legal services that she sees at her office each day. “At Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant Rights, we receive countless calls from immigrants languishing in detention centers, seeking legal guidance because they cannot afford an attorney,” she said. “With the historic implementation of our country’s first ever court-appointed counsel system for detained immigrants, beginning today, members of our community will finally have a fair shake at seeking legal remedies that can prevent their deportation and permanent exile from their families.”

Javier Valdes, Co-Executive Director of Make the Road NY, said, “Nothing is more frightening for an immigrant family than having a loved one in deportation proceedings and not understanding the process. The pilot program launching today will give hundreds of immigrant families the peace of mind that they have a skilled advocate on their side and a better chance of staying together. It’s an innovation the city should keep.”

“This program marks a sea change in the quality of justice afforded to immigrants in New York,” said Luisanna Del Rosario, a law student in the Immigration Justice Clinic at Cardozo School of Law. “NYIFUP ensures the provision of high quality legal representation to immigrants and thereby helps realize the American principle of due process.”

The City Council’s \$500,000 investment will allow two legal service organizations, The [Bronx Defenders](#) and [Brooklyn Defender Services](#), to provide representation for 190 of the approximately 900 indigent detained and otherwise-unrepresented immigrants who will face deportation in the New York City Immigration Court this year.

“Any person held in detention--and especially those facing deportation and separation from family and community--should have a right to high quality legal representation,” said Robin Steinberg, Executive Director of The Bronx Defenders. “The Bronx Defenders is thrilled to be part of a groundbreaking initiative that will expand our holistic model and extend legal defense to immigrants fighting to stay in this country.”

Lisa Schreibersdorf, Executive Director of Brooklyn Defender Services predicted that the new program was likely to make a tremendous difference. “People facing deportation who are not represented by counsel are likely to be unaware of immigration remedies that can allow them to stay in this country,” said Schreibersdorf. “Our talented and dedicated staff will be able to assist hundreds of immigrants and their families by preventing wrongful deportations and reducing detention of people who are part of our community. Brooklyn Defender Services is honored to serve the large immigrant community of New York City as we embark on this first project of its kind in the country.”

The experience of Carlos Rodriguez Vasquez, a member of NMCIR bears this out. Carlos, who was detained for eight months, noted that without proper representation, he would still be in detention to this day. “I wish that a program like NYIFUP existed when I was detained in February of this year. Up until last week I was sitting in a detention facility in New Jersey, far away from my family and my US citizen daughter,” Carlos said. “Thanks to the lawyers at Cardozo Law School and the work of the rest of the NYIFUP team, I was released and now continue to fight my case, while being home with



my daughter and family. I am also fortunate in that my boss took me back, and I am now making money to sustain my family once again.”

The one-year pilot program will be administered by the Vera Institute of Justice, an independent, nonpartisan and nonprofit center for justice policy and practice which will oversee the program, coordinate the delivery of legal services and analyze data emerging from the pilot. “The Vera Institute of Justice looks forward to analyzing the results of the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project pilot,” said Oren Root, Director of Vera’s Center on Immigration and Justice. “We at Vera and our NYIFUP partners are most grateful for the exemplary cooperation and flexibility exhibited by the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in helping to make the pilot as efficient as possible.”

City Council Speaker, Christine Quinn, was hopeful that the City Council’s investment would spark similar programs elsewhere. “Today we are taking a step towards making sure that every New Yorker facing deportation is provided with representation regardless of their ability to pay,” said Speaker Quinn. “We hope this program will help serve as an example to other cities and states across the country and that in the future we will see a system of universal representation for all detained immigrants.”
