



Memorandum of Support
The Access to Representation Act (A.270, Cruz / S.141, Hoylman-Sigal)

Her Justice strongly supports passage of the Access to Representation Act (S.141/A.270) in 2025, accompanied by strong and increased investments in immigration legal services in the Fiscal Year 2026 Budget. Specifically, we urge a total investment of \$100 million to support immigration legal services, comprising \$80 million to sustain and supplement existing grants to ensure that legal services providers can recruit and retain staff to keep pace with growing needs; \$10 million to expand deportation defense and direct support to vulnerable individuals facing removal; and \$10 million for capacity building for legal service providers so that these organizations have the resources to strengthen their programs and continue to offer high-quality, life-saving assistance.

Her Justice is a nonprofit organization that advocates with and for women living in poverty in New York City by providing free legal services, in partnership with pro bono attorneys at New York City's law firms, in the areas of family, matrimonial and immigration law. Her Justice clients come from all over New York City – 31% live in Queens, 29% in Brooklyn, 23% in the Bronx, 13% in Manhattan and 2% in Staten Island. They also represent New York City: 54% are Latina, 24% are Black, 9% are Asian, 8% are White and 5% are Native American or from another minority group. All our clients are in critical need of legal support; 83% are survivors of intimate partner violence; 70% are mothers; 70% were born outside of the U.S.; and 48% need an interpreter in court.

Her Justice's immigration practice focuses on serving immigrant survivors of intimate partner violence, trafficking, and other forms of gender-based violence. Even in the best of times, the cards are stacked against our clients. But the COVID-19 pandemic had a disproportionate impact on our clients and other immigrants in New York, causing great instability for them and their families. Many immigrants worked on the frontlines during the pandemic, suffering deeply the challenge of juggling work and childcare and keeping family safe. Families' hard-won financial stability became shakier. And all the while, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services continued to raise barriers to our clients' ability to stabilize their lives and work legally in this country. With an already flawed immigration system, the recent threats to and implemented changes in immigration policies by the presidential administration are causing confusion and deep-seated fear in immigrant communities. The need for free, quality, and culturally and linguistically competent immigration legal services and accurate, accessible information in immigrant communities has never been more critical. Her Justice's free legal services have a



transformative impact on our clients' lives, giving them greater economic stability, safety, confidence, access to critical services like health care, mental health support and food security; ultimately, our services give clients a sense of belonging that enables them to be better parents to their children.

The Access to Representation Act (S.141/A.270), will create a right to counsel for anyone in New York facing deportation who cannot afford legal representation and provide much needed funding to build the supply of legal services, along with social services support, to meet the demand throughout New York State. Immigrants facing deportation risk permanent separation from their families and forced return to dangerous or deadly conditions in another country, yet they are not guaranteed a lawyer if they cannot afford one. Having a lawyer makes a huge difference: detained immigrants with lawyers win their cases at over 10 times the rate of those who don't have legal help. For non-detained people, nearly two thirds with lawyers win their cases compared to 17 percent of those without a lawyer. New York's investment in immigration legal services promotes safety and family unity for immigrant New Yorkers, but current funding is insufficient: more than 170,000 people in New York State are currently fighting for their lives in immigration court alone. By passing the ARA and strengthening investments in immigration legal services in FY26, New York can lead the way with humanitarian policies that center human dignity and make our state stronger.

New York's enhanced investment in immigration legal and social services will bring critical benefits to families, communities, and our economy. Over one in three New York children have an immigrant parent, and more than one quarter of the State's workforce is foreign-born. New York immigrants own more than 280,000 businesses and have an estimated \$130 billion in annual spending power. Immigration policies that enable more community members to remain at home, on the job, and with their families make our state safer and benefit our economy—not just for immigrants but for everyone.

For all the above reasons, we urge passage of the ARA in 2025 and increased investments in immigration legal services in the Fiscal Year 2026 Budget.

Please contact Rachel Branstein, Director of Policy, at rbraunstein@herjustice.org for further information.