

Friday, April 4th, 2025

The Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor of New York State
Executive Chamber
State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Hochul,

We, the undersigned immigrant rights and legal services providers, urgently call on your leadership to protect New York's immigrant children so they can continue to receive the legal services they so desperately need. We are on the frontlines every day, defending children—some as young as toddlers—from an immigration system designed for adults. But the legal services network built over decades is now on the verge of being dismantled.

On March 21, 2025, the Trump administration announced the near-total shutdown of funding for programs providing legal representation to unaccompanied children. Without immediate state action, thousands of children will be left without legal counsel, and the infrastructure built to protect them will disappear.

We urge you to include \$18 million in emergency funding through the Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) to sustain legal service providers impacted by the federal cuts. New York State providers lost \$18 million in funding under this contract, leaving thousands of unaccompanied children at risk of deportation without legal representation. These children are fleeing violence, trafficking, and persecution, and without a lawyer, they are nearly guaranteed to lose their case and be sent back to life-threatening situations. This emergency funding is critical to bridging the gap and ensuring providers can continue their life-saving work.

Last year alone, more than 8,000 unaccompanied minors arrived in New York. Thanks to the Unaccompanied Children Program (UCP), 10 organizations, employing nearly 200 legal professionals, provided life-saving legal services to 7,700 children. Now, with \$18 million stripped away, those organizations and their staff face uncertain futures, and the children they serve face an even more uncertain path.

Right now, there are 1,800 open representation cases under this contract, children who have already secured legal counsel but now stand to lose it. These children, many of whom have already endured unimaginable trauma, will be forced to navigate an impossible system alone.

At the same time, ICE has ramped up enforcement against unaccompanied children, increasing the need for expert legal counsel. Just last month, 10 ICE agents showed up at a teenager's home. Stories like these will only multiply if children are left to face the system alone. Without urgent action, more children will face deportation alone, with life-or-death consequences.

New York has the opportunity and the responsibility to step in where the federal government has failed. The infrastructure exists; we simply need the resources to sustain it. We urge you to include an additional \$18 million to ensure unaccompanied children continue to receive legal representation.

Governor Hochul, we cannot afford to let these children go without the protection they deserve. With this funding stripped away, legal service providers across New York are at risk, jeopardizing the entire ecosystem of support for unaccompanied children. If we fail to act, these children will be forced to face a system stacked against them, without an attorney to defend their rights. Your leadership is critical in ensuring that does not happen. We urge you to act swiftly to prevent this from becoming a heartbreaking reality.

We stand ready to work with your office to secure these vital investments and ensure that New York continues to be a beacon of hope and protection for immigrant children.

Sincerely,

CAMBA
Catholic Charities Community Services, Archdiocese of New York
Catholic Migration Services
Center for Elder Law & Justice
Central American Legal Assistance
Central American Refugee Center
Church World Service (CWS)
Co-Counsel NYC
Community Resource Center
Deportation Defense Clinic at Hofstra Law School
Empire Justice Center
Frank H. Hiscock Legal Aid Society
Gay Men's Health Crisis, Inc.
Goddard Riverside Community Center
Her Justice
Housing Conservation Coordinators

Immigrant Children Advocates' Relief Effort (ICARE)
Immigrant Justice Corps
JustCause
Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)
Kovalski Esq PC
Latinos Unidos Por El Futuro
Lawyers For Children
Legal Services of the Hudson Valley
Lutheran Social Services of New York
Make the Road New York
My Sisters' Place
New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC)
New York Legal Assistance Group
Prisoners' Legal Services of New York
Pro Bono Net
Safe Harbor Clinic
Safe Horizon
Safe Passage Project
South Bronx United, Inc.
St. John's University School of Law
The Door's Legal Services Center
The Legal Aid Society (New York)
The Legal Aid Society of Rochester, NY
The Legal Project
UnLocal
Urban Justice Center
Volunteer Lawyers Project of CNY, Inc.
Volunteers of Legal Service
Worker Justice Center of New York
Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights