



Beyond Traditional Lawyering Promoting Immigrant Participation in American Democracy



TEACHING, INTERPRETING AND CHANGING LAW SINCE 1979





Mission Statement

The ILRC works with immigrants and citizens to make critical legal assistance and social services accessible to all, regardless of income, and to build a society that values diversity and respects the dignity and rights of all people.

The **Immigrant Legal Resource Center** is a national resource center that provides trainings, materials and advocacy to advance immigrant rights. As a legal services organization, we train lawyers and paralegals on ever-changing and complex immigration law. We develop leadership by encouraging immigrants to play leading roles in confronting and reshaping the laws and policies that perpetuate racial, economic and social injustice. And we educate and empower those in the immigrant community so that they may organize and advocate for the rights and privileges that best define our democratic traditions.

Introduction

The United States is a land of immigrants. For centuries, the diverse skills, values, customs and perspectives that new immigrants have brought with them have helped to shape and fulfill the ideals that are at the heart of America's pluralistic society and democratic tradition. Today, as they work to make better lives for themselves and their families, immigrants from all over the world continue to enrich and enhance the collective American experience.

While America's identity is proudly linked to the immigrant experience, America's history is sadly marked by anti-immigrant attitudes and movements. Today immigrants still face significant obstacles to full participation in America's civic institutions. For many, the process of democratic government is unfamiliar; indeed, the concept of government itself may be something to fear. At the same time, opportunities for immigrants to learn about American institutions and how to navigate them are limited. Not surprisingly, these barriers to joining American civic life discourage many immigrants from engaging in it at all. What's more, all too often their extraordinary contributions are greeted with fear, hostility, and suspicion.

Widely regarded as one of the country's foremost leaders on immigration law and policy, the **Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC)** has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to helping immigrants improve their access to American civic life since 1979. Among its core values, the ILRC holds that, as a matter of fairness and equity, the rights of immigrants must be advocated for and protected. As people who contribute by working, paying taxes, attending religious institutions, studying in schools and so much more, immigrants deserve a fair say in shaping the policies and practices that affect them. As a nation that values democracy, we must ensure that everyone—regardless of race, gender, sexual preference, income, class, religion, or immigration status—is granted equal voice in and access to the democratic process.

The ILRC continues to make extraordinary progress in this field. Our experience shows that immigrants do in fact want to engage in American civic life. Members of the immigrant community eagerly seek out and seize opportunities to learn about American society, laws and policies and fulfill their responsibilities. They yearn to develop knowledge, expertise, and confidence to share their ideas and concerns and to learn about the ideas and concerns of others. They aspire to positively impact their own neighborhoods as well as the broader community.

The ILRC has developed a comprehensive tool set for its efforts, drawing upon lessons learned since 1979 through its work teaching immigration law and practice to service providers, providing direct legal services to immigrants, and collaborating with community organizers, immigrant leaders, grassroots immigrant-led groups and

advocacy organizations on initiatives aimed at reforming immigration policy and building immigrant communities. The ILRC regularly shares these tools through technical assistance, training, and print and electronic materials offered to attorneys, paralegals, lay advocates, immigrant leaders and others interested in helping immigrants create social change for themselves.

This monograph provides an introductory overview of the ILRC's work to promote immigrant civic participation and invites readers to learn more about the organization. *Part One* briefly outlines our varying approaches and the values behind them. *Part Two* provides examples of past projects with key accomplishments.



“WE COME TO THIS COUNTRY WITHOUT KNOWING THE POLITICAL PROCESS, SO WHAT THE ILRC GIVES US IS THE EDUCATION TO WORK WITHIN THE SYSTEM AND CHANGE THE LAW. EVEN THOUGH WE WEREN'T BORN HERE, WE CAN START TAKING THE FIRST STEPS AS SOON AS WE BECOME AMERICAN CITIZENS.”

GUADALUPE SIORDIA ORTIZ
Coordinator, el Comité de Padres Unidos

Part One:

Approaches and Values

As an organization committed to the rights and privileges that are the hallmark and promise of democracy, the ILRC provides trainings, materials and advocacy to advance immigrant rights in the United States. As a service organization, we partner with lawyers and paralegals and train them on ever-changing and complex immigration law. We identify and develop immigrant and community leaders so that they may play leading roles in confronting and reshaping the laws and policies that perpetuate racial, economic and social injustice; and we seek to build a society that values diversity and respects the dignity and democratic freedoms of all people.

Client Partnerships

The ILRC believes that immigrant clients should be engaged as problem-solving partners in their legal cases and we teach these methods of client centered lawyering in all levels of our work and for all audiences, whether through a “how to” manual for paralegal service providers, a consultation by phone with a pro bono attorney handling an asylum case, or a basic immigration law seminar for ESL teachers. After all, clients typically possess the most direct and comprehensive knowledge of the events happening around them and therefore can contribute valuable ideas and opinions that fundamentally shape outcomes. Lawyers can draw upon clients as resources regarding whom to approach for support, as gatherers of important documentation, and as storytellers, decision makers, strategists, and organizers in their own cases. By working directly with clients as partners, immigrants learn skills—from framing problems to finding solutions—that are applicable to other areas of their lives, families and communities.

***BUILDING A SOCIETY THAT VALUES
DIVERSITY AND RESPECTS THE
DIGNITY AND RIGHTS OF ALL PEOPLE.***

Immigrant Leadership Development

The ILRC remains convinced that integration into civic life for immigrants and a stronger democracy rests heavily on the strength of immigrant leadership and immigrant participation. In teaching the much-needed skills for civic engagement—those that facilitate a decision maker’s listening to, understanding, and addressing immigrants’ concerns—the ILRC has created a leadership program through which we train immigrants to aid their effective participation in community advocacy campaigns and, ultimately, better serve their communities. The ILRC created a leadership development curriculum designed specifically for immigrant audiences,

one that has been implemented both locally and nationally by the ILRC's trainers and by other community-based agencies through a turn-key trainer model. We work with professional community organizers, working-class immigrants, heads of grassroots immigrant-led groups and advocacy organizations, among others.

The ILRC's curriculum employs participatory and experiential teaching techniques that draw from participants' strengths and experiences as they develop skills to become leaders. They practice skills such as brainstorming, role playing, combating anti-immigrant myths, public speaking, navigating institutions and systems, organizing press conferences, and evaluating their own and each other's work. In advanced leadership sessions, participants work to develop their own skills as leadership trainers and to create and implement programs that address the needs that have been identified in their communities.

Capacity Building

The ILRC believes that immigrant-led grassroots organizations, professional organizing associations, advocacy organizations and service providers can effectively develop the civic influence of immigrant communities. We offer training and support in substantive immigration practice, community advocacy, and leadership development to build the capacity of service providers. We help agencies apply for BIA recognition and accreditation and set up efficient case management protocols. As always, the client partnership model is an intrinsic component of this work. We provide direction and advice to advocacy organizations and professional organizers in order to help their immigrant constituents determine issues around which to organize and for which to advocate. We work intensively and directly with immigrants themselves to found, nurture, and sustain grassroots groups to meet vital and previously unmet community needs. We help develop these problem solvers as role models living and working in their communities.

Community Organizing

The ILRC contributes its expertise in immigration law and policy as a partner with community organizers pursuing social justice agendas that address immigration policies as well as broader community issues. These partners may include immigrant-led organizations with both direct service and advocacy components to their work, such as el Comite de Padres Unidos and Voluntarios de la Comunidad, as well as professional community organizers with immigrant membership bases, including Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), the Pacific Institute of Community Organizing (PICO), and Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) affiliates.



The ILRC plays a number of roles in these community organizing partnerships. Its policy analysis and legal expertise support organizers and leaders as they shape their social change objectives, formulate strategies, and develop outreach materials. In addition, the ILRC recruits and organizes volunteer immigration attorneys to attend community meetings in order to provide attendees with mini assessment and referral sessions, a highly effective means of attracting new members from the immigrant community to the social change platforms of our collaborating organizers.

While these partnerships are an opportunity for the ILRC to share its expertise, they also provide an opportunity for the ILRC to further develop its understanding of the issues most affecting the immigrant community. Through these collaborations, the ILRC learns directly from immigrants how specific laws and practices are affecting their families and uses that information in its own advocacy efforts. Our work is imbued with the spirit of helping immigrants help themselves, voice their concerns, develop strategies, and lead efforts to address their needs.

Media Advocacy & Outreach

The ILRC recognizes the power of the media in shaping public perception, influencing policy, and educating the immigrant community. And we recognize the media as an outlet through which communities can voice concerns and galvanize community members. Engaging the media is both a tool for advocacy and a skill for engaging in the democratic process and therefore is a core ingredient in much of the ILRC's work, from capacity building to leadership development and organizing. To support the advocacy and organizing work of the community based organizations and immigrant leaders who are our allies, the ILRC has established numerous relationships with print and broadcast media, especially non-English media. In this, the ILRC partners with service providers, organizers, and grassroots immigrant-led groups and advocacy organizations. We make certain that affected immigrants and their families are involved in the decision-making process. The ILRC serves as an advisor, guiding its allies in developing the content and strategy for media campaigns. Immigrants and other partners are trained in how to establish and maintain contacts with the media, how to write press releases and hold press conferences, how to match particular cases and events with media outlets, how to select effective times and places to attract media, and how to work with speakers and develop key messages. The ILRC also advises on ways to discuss immigration raids, procedures for immigrating, reports of fraudulent practices, and pending changes to the legal system. We train immigrants in media usage in order to draw attention to and dramatize how existing or proposed immigration legislation and procedures may affect immigrants and the nation. This work helps immigrants effectively share their personal stories in order to advocate for more immigrant-friendly policies. Furthermore, it is the immigrants themselves that play principal or feature roles with the media, not the ILRC.



Part Two:

Project Examples and Key Accomplishments

The following ILRC projects provide a sample of our efforts to enhance the capacity of immigrants to engage in American civic life and strengthen our democracy.

Fair Immigration Provisions: ILRC & el Comité de Padres Unidos

In 1988, a group of immigrant parents concerned about the separation of their family members due to oversights in immigration laws approached the ILRC about helping form a group to keep their loved ones united. The ILRC helped these parents found el Comité de Padres Unidos (Padres) and mentored its leaders so that today Padres (with more than 70 volunteer members, mostly from the San Francisco Latino community) is well known for its ability to galvanize immigrants around issues of importance. The ILRC and Padres continue to work together as allies to promote policies that strengthen and support immigrant families.



In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the ILRC helped Padres—through leadership training, media advocacy, outreach skills building, and technical support—to organize letter-writing and petition campaigns to address the 1986 legalization program, which essentially forced families into hardship and separation for years in order to gain legal status. As a result of these efforts (which included coordination with groups and advocates across the country), the Immigration and Naturalization Service (now the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service) promulgated a family fairness regulation allowing individuals who did not qualify for legalization to remain with family members who did. A few years later,

Congress passed a family unity law that expanded and codified the family fairness regulation. And during the mid-1990s, the ILRC trained and educated Padres volunteers to help family members become naturalized U.S. citizens, new voters, and engaged civic participants.

Today, Padres has several trained immigrant leaders that organize members and others from the immigrant community to advocate on behalf of issues vital to the community. Padres works on advocacy campaigns, such as fair immigration policies, drivers' licenses for all who qualify regardless of immigration status, in-state college tuition for all who qualify regardless of immigration status, and others. Padres successfully uses the media, petition drives, community organizing,

education and outreach, as well as visits to legislators, policy makers and administrators to instigate change.

Extensions of INA Section 245(i): ILRC & the Central Valley Partnership

While attending community meetings in 1997, the ILRC repeatedly heard the concerns of immigrant families who would soon be affected by the expiration of Immigration and Nationality Act Section 245(i). The ILRC learned that hundreds of thousands of immediate family members of U.S. citizens and legal residents would soon be unable to obtain legal status without returning to their country of origin. After doing so, these family members would be barred from reentering the U.S. for as many as ten years. Community members were justifiably alarmed and anxious about the possibility of entire families being torn apart as a result of the upcoming change in law.

In response, the ILRC teamed up with partners throughout California's agricultural heart, the Central Valley, in order to organize a grassroots community advocacy campaign aimed at convincing Congress to extend 245(i) and thereby keep families together. During dozens of community meetings members of the Central Valley Partnership (CVP), an organization with which the ILRC played a substantial role, collected more than 40,000 signatures throughout California (including 15,000 from the Tulare County area of the San Joaquin Valley alone) and organized a delegation of immigrant farm workers to present these petitions to key members of Congress in Washington. Additionally, during this trip the farm worker delegation educated members of Congress about the impact of the law upon immigrant farm workers and their families. During this campaign, the ILRC helped the immigrant leaders identify, frame, and plan their advocacy efforts. As a result of this work and the work of many others, Congress enacted an extension of the law in November 1997 that helped as many as 500,000 family members continue their legal residency cases here in the U.S. and thus not be threatened with family separation.

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Leadership Building with Centro Bilingüe

In the mid-1990s, the ILRC worked with Centro Bilingüe, a grassroots immigrant-led advice and referral agency in East Palo Alto, California to train dedicated volunteers in a variety of basic leadership skills. The ILRC and Centro's goal was to demonstrate—through a dynamic curriculum emphasizing participatory learning and self-critique—that community members can gain both the capacity and expertise to serve as leaders who educate one another, plan and execute program initiatives.

The ILRC and Centro trained area immigrants in public speaking, holding press conferences, conducting outreach, running meetings, combating anti-immigrant myths, teaching others about civic rights and responsibilities, interacting with public and private institutions, and advocating with and educating public leaders. Participating leaders then developed and initiated youth civic action projects and know-your-rights campaigns, and began working with local government. These same participants then spread the skills they had developed throughout their own communities and to other service providers, who continued to replicate the efforts in other areas. Graduates of these trainings became prominent problem solvers and homegrown experts in naturalization and civic responsibility. They went on to become engaging and inspiring ESL and catechism teachers, board members of non-profits, business owners, and educational activists. Based on this experience, the ILRC published and began distributing nationally its highly successful leadership development curriculum.

Capacity Building with Lutheran Immigrant and Refugee Services

In 2000, Lutheran Immigrant and Refugee Services (LIRS), a national cooperative agency of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, approached the ILRC for help in launching their Inspiring Leadership Initiative, the aim of which was to engage immigrant communities, local service providers, and the LIRS Ambassadors Circle in working towards social change. Over the course of a three-day leadership training in Baltimore, Maryland, five LIRS affiliates—including participants from countries as diverse as Somalia, Liberia, the Sudan, Ethiopia, the former Yugoslavia, and El Salvador—took part in this training organized jointly by the ILRC and LIRS. A total of 65 staff, volunteer advocates, and members of the immigrant and refugee communities participated.



The training enabled these leaders to return to their communities and train others. Skill development focused on public speaking, advocacy and navigating U.S. institutions such as local government, law enforcement, schools, social service systems, the media, and employers. Hands-on exercises highlighted ways to develop infrastructure, raise money and manage volunteer programs. The experience helped to motivate several LIRS-affiliated immigrant and refugee service providers to enhance their community outreach, education, and civic engagement activities, reallocating and reconfiguring their staffing to emphasize building community relationships. The participating organizations successfully reached out to ethnic



populations, forged coalitions and implemented new community-based programs. Ultimately, the ILRC and LIRS designed a “how to” manual to help other organizations train representatives in their own communities.

Supporting AB 540: A Campaign of Immigrant Students

In January 2002, California's Assembly Bill (AB) 540 went into effect, allowing undocumented students residing in California who enrolled in public colleges and universities to pay resident tuition rates, a measure that would greatly enhance access to higher education for immigrant students from low-income families. However, for the many colleges in the University of California (UC) system, it was left up to the UC's governing Board of Regents to decide whether or not to adopt this state law. A group of immigrant high school and college students who wanted to ensure that the Board of Regents decided in their favor approached the ILRC to help launch a targeted immigrant grassroots organizing and advocacy campaign.

Using established relationships, the ILRC identified additional groups of students from the San Francisco Bay Area and Sonoma County interested in carrying out such a campaign to inform their peers, teachers, school administrators, and communities about the benefits offered by AB 540 to undocumented immigrant students. The ILRC trained these student groups about the provisions of AB 540, its applications and its limitations. Through a series of sessions at schools and community organizations, immigrant students learned how to execute campaigns effectively. The ILRC also attended the Board of Regents meeting in Los Angeles, sharing its speaking time with an immigrant student who would be directly affected by the outcome of the UC decision. Ultimately, the Board of Regents accepted AB 540 for the entire UC system.



Ultimately, the leadership and advocacy skills developed by these young immigrant leaders was as significant as the legislative win. They learned how to conduct outreach, work with the media and make public presentations. They pressed the UC Regents to adopt AB 540 by submitting written testimonials about their lives as undocumented students in California, highlighting their academic achievements and the positive effects a UC education would have on their futures. They collaborated with educational organizations to explore alternative sources of financial aid and to increase and publicize the private scholarships to which undocumented students may apply. And they helped build a nationwide movement in support of the legalization of undocumented immigrant students through the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act and the Student Adjustment Act.

Know-Your-Rights Campaigns

A know-your-rights campaign reflects the ILRC's belief that immigrants who are equipped with good information can successfully and safely advocate and organize for themselves. The ILRC has conducted know-your-rights outreach campaigns in a variety of contexts: in response to landlords' threats to report tenants to the Immigration Service in landlord-tenant disputes; during periods of increased Immigration Service enforcement activity; and in confrontations with Immigration officers.

A know-your-rights campaign, like any civic action, is dependent upon skillful leadership. From hosting apartment meetings to sharing information about constitutional rights, setting up phone trees where each tenant notifies others about Immigration Service raids to writing and performing skits about how to handle various Immigration Service interactions—these all build skills to create change. Past campaigns by the ILRC have led to the founding of coalitions such as the Tulare County Immigration Network, which has worked with local police and the Immigration Service to stop abusive enforcement behavior. The ILRC has published and distributed materials nationally about know-your-rights campaigns, including “how to” guides, skits developed by immigrant clients, and sample outreach and education flyers.

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Media Advocacy to Support Ana Rivera

Lucia Rivera gained legal status in 1988 through the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) but her daughter Ana, born four months after a cut-off date established by Congress in Family Unity legislation, remained undocumented. During the 1990s, when Ana was just two years old, the Immigration Service arrested the toddler as she returned to the U.S. from a visit to her grandmother in Mexico. In the midst of this enormous human drama and court case, the ILRC and Ana's lawyer saw an opportunity to inform the public, galvanize the immigrant community and potentially change the law.

The ILRC, working with other advocates and grassroots immigrant leaders, launched an outreach and media campaign and petition drive in support of Ana. We sought to educate the public about how cases such as Ana's point to the need for a more humane immigration and refugee policy. As a result of the media attention drawn to her deportation hearing, the Immigration Service agreed to let Ana stay with her mother in the U.S. until she was eligible to immigrate when her turn in the visa waiting list came up. The immigration court granted Ana permanent residency on September 27, 1996, her eighth birthday. That same year a law was proposed that would have prevented low-income people from immigrating their relatives. The publicity and advocacy that the ILRC had generated for the Rivera's compelling case helped influence Congress to moderate its income requirements for those sponsoring a relative's legal immigration.

Group Processing

Most immigrants do not have formal representation during their interviews with Immigration Service officials, all the more reason for them to have a full understanding of and central involvement in their own cases. The ILRC's group processing model has allowed immigrants to learn about and apply for immigration benefits such as naturalization, amnesty, and family unity in effective and interactive ways.

The ILRC's attorneys have presented scores of group processing workshops to facilitate hundreds of immigrants applying and preparing for Family Unity, family-based immigrant visas, amnesty applications and naturalization. Based on these workshops, the ILRC developed three manuals to aid immigrant service providers and encourage them to offer group processing in their communities. Several hundred of these step-by-step guides have been distributed and dozens of service providers have conducted successful group processing programs.

The group processing model is itself an example of immigrant empowerment. As participants themselves document, analyze, make decisions about, and complete forms to apply for immigration benefits, they gain confidence and learn skills that support their development as empowered civic participants. Additionally, applicants that go through the process become volunteers to help other group processing sessions. Because the group processing model has proven to be an efficient and successful means of providing certain immigration services, many service providers have followed it—resulting in more immigrants who are knowledgeable about immigration benefits and fewer people facing deportation proceedings.



Formation of the Committee to Retain Fifth Preference

Beginning in 1981, Senator Alan Simpson (R-Wyoming) began advocating for the elimination of “fifth preference,” under which an adult U.S. citizen could petition for his/her brothers and sisters to immigrate and, in turn, those siblings could be accompanied by their spouses and unmarried children. Asian American communities, who along with Mexicans have been the biggest beneficiaries of the sibling category, were particularly upset by Simpson's campaign.

In response, the ILRC began meeting with and informing members of the Chinese American and Filipino American communities about Simpson's proposals. ILRC attorneys met with church groups, senior citizen groups, service providers, and grassroots immigrant-led groups and advocacy organizations to explain the impact of Simpson's campaign on the various Asian American communities. As a result,

these communities initiated an enormous letter-writing campaign and petition drive aimed at members of Congress. Through local churches, a national effort was successfully waged to speak out against the elimination of fifth preference. The ILRC led trips of community representatives to Washington, DC to deliver messages and petitions to educate policy makers and legislators about the negative effects such a proposal would have upon immigrant communities and families. In the end, Simpson's efforts were rejected and the fifth preference category was saved. Since 1981 there have been other unsuccessful efforts to eliminate the fifth preference.

Advocacy with the Immigration Service

Since 2000 the ILRC has worked with the North Valley Sponsoring Committee (NVSC), the Sacramento Valley Organizing Community (SVOC), and California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation (CRLAF) to advocate with the Immigration Service on specific cases and naturalization issues. Because of the ILRC's established relationship with the Immigration Service's Sacramento, California office, the organization has served as a pivotal intermediary in improving relationships between the Immigration Service, NVSC, SVOC, and CRLAF.

In 2002, as a result of these efforts, the Immigration Service began meeting with SVOC immigrant leaders and organizers, attending SVOC and NVSC actions, adjudicating naturalization applications and conducting oath ceremonies for these organizations' clients. In July 2002, for example, the Immigration Service adjudicated 60 naturalization cases of SVOC constituents at a member church. In 2003, with the ILRC's help, they set aside two days to interview only NVSC naturalization applications at the Immigration Services' office. In the process, the Immigration Service interviewed all 100 NVSC naturalization applicants together. According to many participants, the partnership between SVOC, NVSC, the Immigration Service, CRLAF, and the ILRC helped calm fears about the naturalization exam. Because of this, an overwhelming number of these individuals have passed the exam. The project significantly aided community organizing campaigns with immigrant constituents by increasing the number of organization members gaining U.S. citizenship status, training immigrant leaders in negotiating with a bureaucracy such as the Immigration Service, and introducing immigrant leaders to the power of engaging government officials. Additionally, such collaborative work facilitates organizing efforts as constituents and leaders note campaign successes, develop experience and gain confidence.

The Project for Democracy through Voting

The purpose of the ILRC's Project for Democracy through Voting is to strengthen our democracy by increasing voter education, information, and mobilization among immigrants who live in California's Central Valley and have become naturalized United States citizens. The specific goals of the project are to increase understanding among U.S. naturalized citizens about the voting process and its importance, and to build the capacity of Central Valley immigrant leaders—and organizations serving immigrants—while they conduct voter education activities.

During the early phases of the Project for Democracy through Voting the ILRC gathered input from our constituencies to determine the messages that resonate most with immigrant communities. An important part of this information gathering included a Sacramento Valley survey which provided direction in developing voter outreach materials and other key messages in our voting work.

In 2004-2005, the successes of the ILRC's Project for Democracy through Voting have been the result of community meetings and media events designed as voter outreach, education and mobilization tools; a host of recruited and trained local immigrant leaders; outreach events centered on the importance of voter education and mobilization; and the design of culturally and linguistically sensitive materials containing valuable information on the importance of voting, who is eligible to vote, the voter registration process as well as county specific election information.

These early successes have paved the way for the expansion of the project to communities across the nation. Coupled with that expansion, a planned voting process curriculum designed for use in citizenship classes and by CBOs promises a stronger democracy in which America's newest citizens participate with confidence.

Conclusion

The approaches and examples provided in this monograph are only a sample of the ILRC's commitment to its mission and values; and as the need for efforts such as these continues, so too will the ILRC.

Today, as the ILRC collaborates with community groups, many of them led by immigrants, as well as professional organizing groups and others, the ILRC continues to utilize its legal and policy expertise to aid organizing, outreach and advocacy efforts. Through such collaborations, the ILRC helps immigrant communities gain voice and power so that they may effectively—and safely—pursue policy and social change initiatives on their own.

The ILRC believes that immigrant rights are not the cause of a singular constituency, but a component of a broader movement for civil rights and social, economic, and racial justice that affects us all. Disparate communities in California and across the country are learning that by advocating for fair access, just treatment and equal rights, they're advocating on behalf of a diverse community that includes immigrants, impoverished citizens, communities of color, and so many others.



As a nation that celebrates the contributions of its first immigrants, the United States—particularly in response to the tragedy of 9/11—nonetheless risks its democratic future on policies that restrict the rights, liberties, and freedoms that first defined this country. The ILRC is working to ensure that a country founded on such ideals maintains its course, and that the contributions of immigrant families will continue to add valuable structure to the nation's developing heritage.



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