



# POLICY PRIORITIES | OCTOBER 2019

The Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC) builds a democratic society that values diversity and the rights of all people. Through ILRC's policy and advocacy efforts, we promote a vision of racial justice that advances the rights of all immigrants, including those who have had contact with the criminal legal system.

ILRC engages in policy and advocacy throughout the United States with a particular focus on local policy work in Texas, local and state policy work in California, and policy advocacy at the federal level. Our policy and advocacy efforts are guided by three main pillars: 1) dismantling the arrest to deportation pipeline and disrupting racial disparities in the immigration and criminal legal systems; 2) expanding immigration law to improve protections from deportation and access to immigration relief; and 3) preserving and expanding access to legal services and opportunities for citizens and non-citizens to engage in the political process.

## **Disrupting the Arrest to Deportation Pipeline and Racial Disparities in the Criminal Legal System**

The ILRC is dedicated to the long-term goal of dismantling systems undergirded in racial inequities and investing in the power of local communities to organize and create solutions. As an interim step we focus on disrupting the arrest to deportation pipeline that has led to expansive over-policing and immigration enforcement and has contributed to the mass incarceration and exile of Black people and people of color in the United States. Our work addresses racial disparities in the criminal legal system and builds bridges between impacted communities, advancing solutions that benefit citizens and non-citizens alike.

At the federal level, the ILRC campaigns for a New Way Forward to decriminalize migration and repeal the harsh 1996 immigration laws that funnel non-citizens from the criminal legal system to deportation and exile. We expand the scope of legislative proposals to protect non-citizens with criminal legal system contact and convictions. We build partnerships and educate policy makers to reduce federal immigration enforcement entanglement with

local policing, position our efforts to fight the criminalization of immigrants as part of a larger package of reforms to the criminal legal system, and campaign for solutions rooted in racial justice.

At the state level in California, the ILRC works in coalitions to pass laws that dismantle the systems of mass immigration enforcement and mass incarceration, that reduce the consequences of exposure to the criminal legal system, and that provide all individuals with meaningful opportunities to erase their criminal records. The ILRC plays a critical role in monitoring and ensuring accountability for existing legislative victories, including SB 54 - the state's sanctuary law, newly passed post-conviction tools, and California's legal mandates for district attorneys and criminal defense counsel.

We actively advance legislation that dismantles the system of mass incarceration, including private for-profit detention facilities and that protect vulnerable populations like immigrant youth and immigrant survivors of gender-based violence. The ILRC educates local elected officials, district attorneys, and other stakeholders on the impact and implementation of state laws and works toward a vision of abolishing immigration detention in California. Our work on abolishing detention in California is intended to positively impact other states and catapult a national conversation on abolishing immigration detention.

At the local level in California, the ILRC works in close partnership with directly impacted communities to advocate for local policies that reduce the over-policing and over-prosecution of communities of color, as well as the deportation of immigrants. We work to create, expand, and defend local policies limiting local police entanglement with ICE, increasing alternatives to policing and incarceration, and improving local protections to guard against the disproportionate immigration consequences of crimes.

In Texas, the ILRC builds the capacity of local grassroots community organizations in San Antonio, Houston, San Marcos, and Austin, among other localities, to develop successful strategies to pass and implement pro-immigrant local policies and criminal legal system reforms. In addition, ILRC provides technical assistance throughout the state on the intersection of criminal and immigration law and campaign strategy.

Around the country, the ILRC promotes pro-immigrant laws and policies and provides technical assistance to local elected officials, immigrant rights and criminal legal system reform advocates, and community members to disrupt the arrest to deportation pipeline.

## **Preserving and Expanding Immigration Law to Improve Protections From Deportation and Access to Immigration Relief**

As experts in immigration law with deep connections to the communities impacted by the very same laws, the ILRC seeks to preserve and expand immigration law to improve protections from deportation and access to immigration relief as we continue the struggle for inclusive federal legislation that would allow all members of our immigrant communities a pathway to citizenship.

As the Trump Administration decimates the existing immigration system through executive actions and policy changes, the ILRC is coordinating the immigration advocacy community to monitor, defend, and educate directly impacted individuals about these policy changes. The ILRC has led efforts, along with our partners, to resist the regulatory and other attacks of the Trump Administration on various aspects of immigration law including denaturalization, work authorization for dependent spouses, public charge, and fee waivers.

## **Expanding Access to Legal Services and Opportunities for Citizens and Non-Citizens to Engage in the Political Process**

The ILRC, through our capacity building strategies, invests deeply in training immigration attorneys, public defenders, and other advocates to vociferously defend the rights of immigrants. Our trainings on the intersection of criminal and immigration law and removal defense ensure that attorneys are equipped to tackle harder cases involving individuals with serious convictions and those most aggressively targeted by the administration. Our policy and advocacy efforts support our capacity building strategies by working to expand immigrants' access to legal representation, with a particular focus on the needs of low-income immigrants, as well as opportunities for individuals to engage in the political process.

Specifically, the ILRC engages with policy makers in California to expand immigrants' access to legal services and improves the ability of advocates to provide accurate and up to date analysis about immigration law and policy. Nationally, we seek to enhance the ability of immigrant communities to attain citizenship in coordination with the New Americans Campaign and thereby increase the number of individuals eligible to elect leaders in government. We support communities in influencing local elected officials to enact local policies that reflect their needs.