

NATIONAL IMMIGRANT JUSTICE CENTER

A HEARTLAND ALLIANCE PROGRAM

IMPACT REPORT
JULY 2022 - JUNE 2023



**NIJC Clients
(counterclockwise)**

**Keinar and family members
Anne and her daughter
Robert
Robert P.**

Dear Friends:

Every day, our team at the National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC) is inspired by the stories and journeys of our clients — individuals, families, and children who fled violence and persecution to seek refuge in this country, and those who have lived here for years, built lives, and enriched their communities.

I am often reminded of the poem “Home” by British-Somali poet Warsan Shire. Reading this renews me for the fight for justice. Here is an excerpt:

*you have to understand,
that no one puts their children in a boat
unless the water is safer than the land*

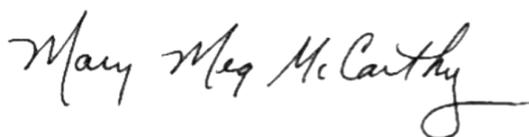
In the face of multiple global humanitarian challenges, people face life and death situations and make the difficult choice to uproot themselves and their families to seek safety and security in a new country. Those who arrive at our border confront an immigration system that is buckling under the weight of our country's increasingly divisive politics. The right to asylum is under attack; families continue to be separated by enforcement, detention, and deportation; and the need for legal services is greater than ever.

As we enter our 40th year, NIJC remains resolute in our work to defend the rights of individuals and families and help them achieve safety and security. Through our impact litigation, advocacy, and strategic communications, we are at the vanguard of the fight for justice. We know that the path to an immigration system that upholds justice and human rights is long and winding, and we are unwavering in the face of challenges old and new.

Included for you in this impact report are highlights of NIJC's work and victories over the past year that demonstrate how we and our partners rose to each challenge. We provided legal services and information to more than 12,000 individuals and families, responded to the needs of a record number of new arrivals in Chicago, achieved a 97 percent success rate in securing legal relief, and secured court decisions and changes in policies and practices that advance justice and human rights. We cannot change lives and support generations to come without your partnership. I hope that this report reinvigorates you for the road ahead.

Thank you for believing in justice and standing with NIJC and the communities we serve.

With gratitude,



Mary Meg McCarthy



NIJC's MISSION

To establish and defend the legal rights of immigrants regardless of background and transform the immigration system to one that affords equal opportunity for all.

NIJC's UNIQUE MODEL

NIJC's multi-pronged model combines four strategies to ensure access to justice for immigrants and their families, while fighting to transform the immigration system into one that upholds justice and human rights.

- **Direct legal services:** Legal information, comprehensive legal screenings, legal representation, and application filing
- **Impact litigation:** Litigation in the federal courts to challenge policies and practices that violate human rights
- **Policy advocacy:** Advocacy at national, state, and local levels and in partnership with coalitions for immigration policies that advance human rights
- **Strategic communications:** Public education through research, reports, presentations, and media

LEGAL SERVICE PRACTICE AREAS

NIJC has the depth and breadth of expertise to provide high-quality legal services in a comprehensive range of matters, including:

- Asylum
- Removal defense
- Adjustment of status for asylees and refugees to obtain lawful permanent residence
- Naturalization
- Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)
- Temporary Protected Status (TPS)
- Legal status for survivors of crime, trafficking, and domestic violence (U visa, T visa, VAWA)
- Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) for children who have been abused, neglected, or abandoned
- Family petitions
- Bond hearings for detained immigrants

IMPACT HIGHLIGHT

Welcoming New Arrivals



NIJC has been at the forefront of welcoming recently arrived migrants to Chicago and responding to an unprecedented need for immigration legal services. **In fall 2022, NIJC provided Know Your Rights presentations to more than 2,600 migrants who arrived in Chicago by bus from Texas.** NIJC worked with community organizations, pro bono partners, and city and state governments to coordinate services.

As new arrivals continue to arrive in Chicago from the U.S.-Mexico border, NIJC and our partners continue to provide critical legal counsel and representation. In summer 2023, we launched a new model of asylum clinics to assist migrants drawing close to their one-year filing deadline with preparing their applications. We also continue to provide legal information through NIJC's Chicago Immigration Court Helpdesk to help immigrants understand their rights and the court system. For those with complex cases, NIJC conducts legal screenings and accepts cases for representation.

NIJC is committed to welcoming migrants to the United States and ensuring that they have access to the rights to which they are entitled under U.S. and international law. Our communities are strengthened and enriched by our immigrant neighbors, both those who are newly arriving to our country and the people and families who have lived here for years.

OUR IMPACT

2023 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

12,231

People reached through legal services and information



2,040

New cases opened



TOP 5 CASE TYPES FOR NEW CASES OPENED

- Asylum
- Adjustment of status
- DACA
- SIJS
- U Visa



5,835

Pending cases carried over from previous years



1,776

Clients represented in removal proceedings



2,580

Total applications filed for legal relief or employment authorization



1,292

Clients granted legal relief



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OUR IMPACT

SECURING PEOPLE'S FUTURES

Because of NIJC's advocacy, our clients can build new lives with their families in the United States. NIJC achieved high success rates in helping our clients secure relief.

97%

Overall legal relief



89%

Asylum



98%

Adjustment of Status



100%

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)



100%

Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS)



99%

Employment authorization



NIJC's PRO BONO PARTNERSHIPS



NIJC collaborates with a network of pro bono partners across the country to advance access to counsel and a more just immigration system.

In FY 2023, **2,088** pro bono attorneys donated more than **66,500** hours to support **2,280** cases.

IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS

Felipe's Story



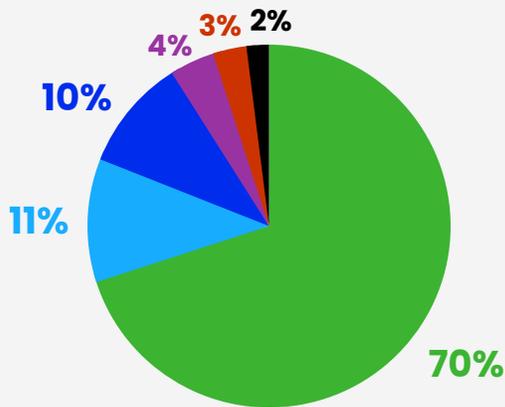
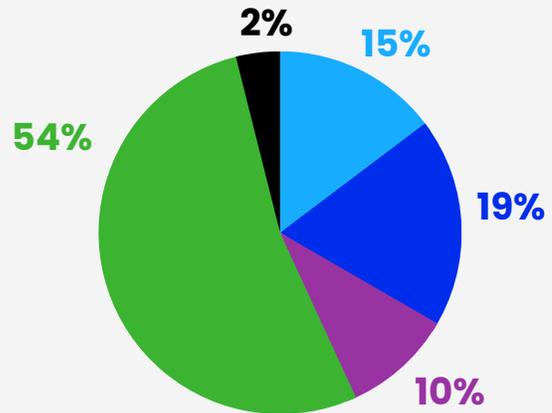
Felipe (pseudonym) turned 11 years old in a shelter for unaccompanied migrant children, thousands of miles away from his parents. He was separated from his parents in May 2022, after they arrived at the U.S.-Mexico border seeking safety in the United States. U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents arrested his parents, Victoria and Anton, near the border, and referred them for criminal prosecution for a misdemeanor offense of failing to report at a port of entry. CBP took Felipe away from his family and designated him as an unaccompanied minor. He was flown more than a thousand miles away to an Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) shelter facility in Illinois.

NIJC met Felipe through our legal services for unaccompanied immigrant children. We launched a campaign to demand that the government reunite Felipe with his parents and filed civil rights complaints asking for an investigation into his separation from his parents. NIJC's advocacy garnered national attention, and support for Felipe and his family grew. NIJC's legal teams represented Felipe, Victoria, and Anton in immigration court. **After more than eight months of separation, the family was finally reunited in February 2023. NIJC is now working with pro bono partners to help the family secure legal relief, and we continue to advocate for and represent other families like Felipe's.**

CLIENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Age

- Children (0-14 years)
- Youth (15-18 years)
- Young Adults (19-24 years)
- Adults (25-64 years)
- Older Adults (65+ years)

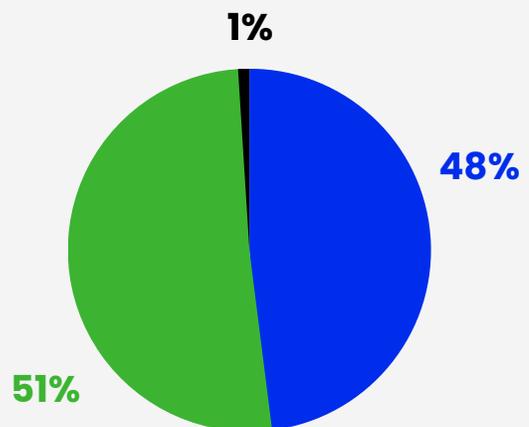


Race / Ethnicity

- Hispanic / Latinx
- Other
- Black
- Asian
- Arab / Middle Eastern
- White

Gender

- Cisgender Woman
- Cisgender Man
- Transgender, Genderqueer/Nonbinary, Gender Fluid or Agender



144 unique countries of origin



73 unique languages spoken



IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS

Protecting the Rights of Immigrant Children



Children who have arrived at the U.S. border without a parent or legal guardian are particularly vulnerable to lasting harm from time spent in U.S. government custody. The federal government’s Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) is legally required to care for unaccompanied children and does so through its network of congregate care facilities, where children navigate complex rules and restrictions as they wait to reunite with their families or transfer to long-term foster care.

In addition to providing direct legal representation to immigrant children in the Chicago area, including those in ORR custody, NIJC advocates for policies and practices that advance children’s rights and welfare. In September 2022, NIJC and the Young Center published a report demonstrating how ORR’s incident reporting system negatively impacts the well-being of unaccompanied and separated children in ORR custody. **As a result of this report and the advocacy of NIJC and our partners, ORR significantly changed its policies, resulting in a less punitive approach.** One change requires every care provider to identify, train, and implement an evidenced-based behavior management plan grounded in child welfare best practices. NIJC and our partners will continue to monitor implementation of new policies to protect the human rights and dignity of immigrant children.

Ensuring Timely Adjudication of Asylum Applications



With the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, the U.S. government committed to expedite asylum decisions for Afghan people who fled to this country within 150 days of an application’s filing. When the U.S. government fell behind on that commitment, NIJC and Kirkland & Ellis LLP represented a class suing the U.S. government over delays in processing their asylum applications. Thousands of Afghan people were still waiting for an asylum decision well past the 150-day deadline. Many of them have spouses and children trapped in Afghanistan, where they are living under constant threat of danger.

In September 2023, NIJC and our partner reached a settlement agreement with the U.S. government. **This settlement will help approximately 20,000 Afghan people seeking asylum in the U.S. and will ensure timely adjudication of their asylum applications.** NIJC and our pro bono partner will continue to monitor compliance with this settlement agreement to ensure that the U.S. government fulfills its promise to the people who worked to support human rights and build democracy in Afghanistan.

IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS

Advancing Access to Legal Counsel

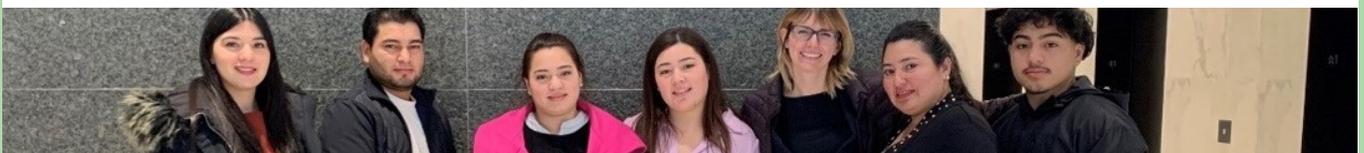


Access to counsel is a fundamental requirement to uphold peoples' due process rights in the United States. Under current law, however, people in deportation proceedings before an immigration court do not have an established right to court-appointed counsel. Immigrants who are detained are less likely than non-detained immigrants to have an attorney. Without representation, these individuals are at risk of deportation and permanent family separation.

NIJC, in collaboration with the Cook County Public Defender's Office, The Immigration Project, and the Resurrection Project, launched the Midwest Immigrant Defenders Alliance (MIDA) to reduce deportations and advance due process in the Chicago Immigration Court. MIDA pilots a universal representation model—in which all people facing deportation would have access to counsel—to offer legal representation to detained, unrepresented immigrants in deportation proceedings in the Chicago Immigration Court.

Since launching in May 2022, MIDA has represented 127 individuals, including lawful permanent residents and long-time community members, asylum seekers and refugees, and parents to U.S. citizen children. **As a result of MIDA's representation, close to a third of all individuals served have been released from detention, and just over a third of all clients with completed cases achieved outcomes permitting them to remain in the United States.**

Defending Access to Asylum



The right to seek asylum in the United States remains under attack. Following the termination in May of Title 42, a policy which for three years had expelled asylum seekers at the border, the government instituted a new asylum ban, making it nearly impossible for many people to apply for asylum. The new rule denies asylum seekers their right to seek asylum if they failed to do so in any of the countries they crossed through to get to the United States. In addition, people must register for an asylum appointment through flawed mobile application and prior to reaching a port of entry. Even when an asylum seeker is able to register, the wait times for an appointment are high, leaving many to wait in a dangerous environment at the border.

NIJC, along with other immigrant rights groups, successfully challenged this rule in federal court, and a federal judge ruled it illegal in July 2023. The government has appealed, meaning that the rule will stay in effect until the appeal is heard, leaving asylum seekers in peril. In this context, NIJC's legal services and advocacy are more important than ever to help immigrants understand their rights and navigate an extremely complex system.

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STAND WITH NIJC TO ADVANCE
IMMIGRANT RIGHTS.



SCAN THE QR CODE TO GET INVOLVED.

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IMMIGRANTJUSTICE.ORG

Questions? Contact us at:
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