

President, Board of Supervisors
District 3



City and County of San Francisco

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San Francisco Board of Supervisors President David Chiu Announces Legal Help for Immigrant Children

City Expanding Right to Civil Counsel Program to Immigrants by Providing City Funds to Leverage Pro Bono Assistance by San Francisco Attorneys

San Francisco, CA – Board of Supervisors President David Chiu today joined the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights (LCCR), the leadership of the San Francisco Bar Association, and other immigrant advocates and youth activists to launch the San Francisco Immigrant Right to Civil Counsel Program. This new program is an expansion of the existing Right to Civil Counsel program, which was championed by President Chiu in 2012 and has focused on assisting tenants facing evictions. Following the success of the initial effort, the City will provide \$100,000 to LCCR to coordinate millions of dollars worth of *pro bono* assistance from private sector attorneys to represent immigrants with cases pending in San Francisco Immigration Court. The launch of this program, in the context of the recent surge of Central American unaccompanied youth crossing the United States border, makes San Francisco the first City in California to provide funding for such help, and sets an example for the recent call to action by Governor Jerry Brown and Attorney General Kamala Harris.

“These young people have legal rights and responsibilities, but they cannot fully participate in complex immigration proceedings without an attorney,” said Attorney General Harris. “It is critical that these children, many of whom are fleeing extreme violence in Central America, have access to due process and adequate legal representation.”

“In our Sanctuary City that welcomes immigrants with open arms, there is no shortage of attorneys who want to volunteer their services during this humanitarian crisis,” said Supervisor David Chiu. “This program is about leveraging *pro bono* resources in a coordinated, cost-effective way so we can begin to provide immigrants and unaccompanied Central American children with the quality representation they need. Ensuring ‘liberty and justice for all’ is what San Francisco is all about.”

“San Francisco has a long history as a Sanctuary City for refugees from Central America and our city services are well prepared to serve our new residents,” said Mayor Ed Lee. “We provide culturally competent services, have a comprehensive public health network that is working proactively with the community to address the unique needs of these children and their families, and have a school district nationally recognized for their immigrant pathway program. Bolstering legal services is a critical next

step to continuing support for this vulnerable population, to ensure they are treated with compassion and respect here in the City of St. Francis.”

- According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, since January 2014, 185 unaccompanied children have been placed in the City with adult sponsors and have pending cases in San Francisco immigration court – although advocates believe there are hundreds more who have sought refuge in the City without a sponsor. A recent U.N. High Commission for Refugees study found that 58 percent of children coming to the U.S. from Central America were forcibly displaced because they suffered or faced harms that qualified them for international protection such as extreme violence, extortion, or sexual assault. Immigrants in deportation proceedings with representation are 5 times more likely to be permitted to remain in the U.S. rather than those without representation.

The Lawyers’ Committee was selected as a grantee for the \$100,000 after a competitive process to choose a coordinator for the Immigrant Right to Civil Counsel Program. The Program will include careful screening of clients and intensive trainings, mentorship, and translators for *pro bono* attorneys. LCCR has already had a long-running Asylum Program, and the organization was able to provide full-scale representation to 311 asylum-seeking clients in 2013 alone, through a network of several dozen law firms. In the same year, *pro bono* attorneys contributed approximately 30,000 hours valued at \$12 million in representation for clients facing deportation. For every dollar they spent on the program, LCCR was able to leverage about \$80 in *pro bono* resources. Under the San Francisco Immigrant Right to Counsel Program, LCCR expects to perform at the same rate of success and anticipates training 400 attorneys each year.

“The San Francisco Immigrant Right to Counsel initiative could not come at a more important time, as immigrants and refugees in complex, high-stakes legal proceedings go before our courts each day without an attorney by their sides,” said Paul Chavez, Senior Attorney and Pro Bono Coordinator of the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights. “LCCR knows from our years of experience of leveraging *pro bono* resources that the Bay Area private bar always steps up in times of need. This exciting collaboration between the City, the private bar, our nonprofit partners, and the larger community promises to elevate the crucial contributions of *pro bono* attorneys to a new level and is a major step forward in bridging the justice gap for those in need.”

“We are very excited about the City and County of San Francisco including legal services for immigration cases in its Right to Civil Counsel (RTCC) efforts and funding,” said Yolanda Jackson, Interim Executive Director of The Bar Association of San Francisco and the Justice and Diversity Center. “Through our RTCC pilot project, private attorneys stepped up and answered the call to provide *pro bono* representation in eviction and family law cases. We will share our best practices and connections with the grantee so that they achieve similar success in the immigration area. Together, we will ensure that low-income people are no longer forced to represent themselves in cases involving basic human needs.”

“Due to the efforts of a lot of people, San Francisco has become one of the leaders in the national fight induced in justice caused by the unrepresented having to go to civil court in very important legal matters,” said James Brosnahan, a partner at Morrison & Foerster and one of the early champions of the San Francisco Right to Civil Counsel Pilot Program. “San Francisco should be very proud of these efforts.”

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