



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jeffrey D. Klein

## IDC Protects Immigrant Communities with Largest Legal Aid Fund in State History

JEFFREY D. KLEIN April 5, 2017

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*\$10 million will be used to provide vital legal services, help immigrants apply for citizenship, job training & more*

**Albany, NY** — The **Independent Democratic Conference** made the largest commitment to immigrant legal aid in New York State history — securing \$10 million for services in the 2017-2018 budget.

IDC members worked with Gov. Cuomo to secure this major fund which will work in conjunction with Governor Cuomo's Liberty Defense Project.

Immigrant and legal defense groups praised the IDC for their steadfast commitment to immigrant rights. Funding awards include: \$4 million to the Vera Institute of Justice, \$1 million to the New York Immigration Coalition, \$1 million to the Empire Justice Center, \$1 million to the Northern Manhattan Immigration Coalition for Immigrant Rights, \$2 million to the Hispanic Federation and \$1 million to Catholic Charities Community Services.

"This is a country built by immigrants and we must do everything we can to protect our immigrant communities. These vital funds knock down the financial wall immigrants face during deportation hearings by providing free legal assistance. The Independent Democratic

Conference recognized the true urgency for funding immigrant legal defense services and delivered to ensure that families aren't torn apart. I want to thank Gov. Cuomo on behalf of the IDC for his leadership on this critical issue," **said IDC Leader Jeff Klein (D-Bronx/Westchester).**

"America is a nation of immigrants and the Independent Democratic Conference is proud to protect our immigrant communities through this \$10 million investment to help prevent deportations and help immigrants apply for citizenship. This funding will make a positive difference in the lives of immigrant families who want nothing more than the American Dream," **said IDC Deputy Leader David Valesky (D-Syracuse).**

"As an immigrant and the daughter of an immigrant, I am gratified that New York State has chosen to stand behind immigrant communities. Serious inequities exist in deportation court that lead to unnecessary deportations, broken families, and communities that live in fear of their government. This \$10 million in state funding for immigrant legal defense will go a long way towards ensuring that the immigration process is fair to all parties involved and that New York welcomes and values its immigrant communities," **said Senator Marisol Alcantara (D-Manhattan).**

"We are living in different times, and a sign of that is the urgent need we have to protect our immigrant communities more than ever. The IDC is committed to helping immigrants as a part of this year's budget process, and this is a clear, unquestionable way of doing just that. We are a city, a state, a country of immigrants, and no one can change that. My door is always open to anyone, who like my parents, came here searching for the American Dream," **said Senator Jose Peralta (D-Queens).**

"Now more than ever, immigrant families in New York are uneasy about the actions being taken at the federal level and the fear of deportation or losing a family member to deportation is indescribable. Those facing immigration actions have an exponentially higher

chance of winning their cases when they have legal representation. That's why the IDC worked to secure this critical funding to ensure that across the state public defenders are available for those in deportation court," **said Senator Diane Savino (D-Staten Island/Brooklyn).**

"Funding immigrant defense initiatives is a matter of human dignity that will help keep families together. These families do not deserve to be targeted unfairly and be forced to live in fear as law abiding citizens. I'm glad New York is continuing to stand up for the diversity that makes our State what it is," **said Senator David Carlucci (D-Rockland/Westchester).**

"This country was built on the backs of immigrants who came here looking for a better life for them and their families, many of them fleeing persecution. I am proud to be part of the fight to fund programs that provide necessary aid to immigrant communities and will continue to ensure that any person who needs help or resources knows that my office door is open to assist them. This historic funding shows that our state will continue to support and protect every New Yorker regardless of their origin," **said Senator Tony Avella (D-Queens).**

"Our nation has a history of benefiting from the genius of immigrants – their creativity, their talents, and their contributions to our communities make us all immeasurably richer. We must be prepared to defend our immigrant communities from those who seek to build walls instead of bridges. For each unjust misstep, for each affront to our inclusive values, we must be prepared to manifest our core beliefs. That's why this \$10 million investment in immigrant legal services is so important. It comes at a moment when New Yorkers are looking to us for reassurance that Lady Liberty's torch will not dim. I am proud to stand with my colleagues, uphold these values, and dedicate the resources to help our immigrant friends and neighbors," **said Senator Jesse Hamilton (D-Brooklyn).**

This \$10 million commitment builds upon the IDC's funding announced last year to the Vera Institute of Justice's New York Immigrant Family Unity Project, which provides attorneys to

individuals detained in upstate New York immigration courts. The program increases the chances that immigrants will win their cases by 1,000 percent.

The funds will be awarded to immigrant legal services groups through the state's Office of New Americans and will be used for immigrant defense services to prevent deportation, green card application processing, job assistance and other endeavors to advance immigrant rights.

Immigrant groups thanked IDC members for providing the critical aid.

"The New York Immigrant Family Unity Project protects New Yorkers who have a legal right to stay in the United States from being unjustly torn from their families and our communities. Our immigrant communities are under increased threat. The Vera Institute of Justice, a member of the NYIFUP Coalition, applauds the Independent Democratic Conference for delivering on their promise to help our immigrant families," **said Oren Root, director of the Center on Immigration and Justice at the Vera Institute of Justice.**

"We applaud the Independent Democratic Conference for making this investment in protecting immigrant communities. At a time when New York's immigrants are under attack, this funding will go a long way to supporting projects that will protect, defend and empower our communities across the state," **said Steven Choi, executive director, New York Immigration Coalition.**

"Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrants Rights receives hundreds of calls a day from immigrants seeking much needed, trustworthy legal assistance. NMCIR is at the frontline of preventing deportations, and has been for the last 35 years. This program allows for immigrants who have a legal right to stay, actually exercise that right with court-appointed counsel, closing this unforgivable justice gap. As a member of the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project, we applaud Senator Klein and Senator Alcantara for once again

championing this cause,” said **Angela Fernandez, Esq., Executive Director of Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant Rights.**

“Access to legal assistance can be a game changer for immigrant families facing our country’s changing and challenging immigration and legal systems. We are extremely grateful to the Senate’s Independent Democratic Conference for this support which will allow us to assist many more people who are facing the growing threat of deportation at the the very same time their rights and protections are being eroded,” said **Linda Bennett-Rodriguez, Senior Immigration Attorney working in the Westchester offices of the Empire Justice Center,** a statewide legal services organization working to secure social and economic justice for marginalized New Yorkers.

“Immigrants are the fabric of our state and nation, and we must do all we can to protect them so they can continue to uplift our communities and contribute to our prosperity. This work is more important than ever as a result of the unprecedented anti-immigrant rhetoric and action being promoted by the current federal administration. We are looking forward to providing our immigrants free legal services, assistance with deportation proceedings and other integration support services. We thank the Independent Democratic Conference for this vital funding for New York's immigrant communities,” said **Jose Calderon, President of the Hispanic Federation.**

“Factual information and competent assistance for immigrant communities is becoming needed more and more across the state. From legal counsel and work authorization to citizenship test preparation, immigrants should know that competent and compassionate help is available to them. The crucial support for this funding from the Independent Democratic Conference will ensure that we are able to sustain these services to New Yorkers, regardless of their religion or nation of origin,” said **Monsignor Kevin Sullivan, Executive Director of Catholic Charities Community Services Archdiocese of New York.**

Earlier this year, the IDC launched the Immigrant Defense Coalition, also known as Sanctuary Senate districts, where each IDC member offers assistance to immigrants in their districts. The IDC launched a toll free hotline, [1\(800\) 213-6385](tel:18002136385), for immigrants to call for legal help.

IDC members also hosted numerous “Know Your Rights” sessions in immigrant communities, with attorneys on hand able to discuss immigration concerns and provide guidance.