



**ICIRR** ILLINOIS COALITION  
FOR IMMIGRANT AND  
REFUGEE RIGHTS

## Immigrant Services Line Item Restoration

The inauguration of a new governor and a new General Assembly provide an opportunity to revisit the Immigrant Services Line Item, which has been included in the state budget for 20 years and currently funds the New Americans Initiative and the Immigrant Family Resource Program.

The need for immigrant services continues to grow, as immigrant communities emerge throughout our state and immigrants seek to improve their lives. Immigrant services are more urgent than ever before under the current federal administration, which has intensified the persecution of immigrants through enforcement and deportation. These threats have made citizenship and legal assistance, outreach, and education to immigrant families, and other supports more important. Based on this analysis and current reality, ICIRR has identified at least four different ways in which our new state government can improve ISLI:

**1. Increase funding to enhance existing capacity and to develop new capacity in underserved emerging communities.** Currently, ISLI is funded at slightly more than \$6 million, down from the \$10 million at which ISLI was originally funded in 1999. This funding level has not allowed ISLI to support all of the organizations that have applied for funding, not to mention other organizations that need and could use the grants but that do not apply. In particular, although more immigrants now live in the Chicago suburbs than in the city itself, the infrastructure for serving immigrants in the suburbs still pales compared to what is available in Chicago. Since 2005, ICIRR along with our partner organizations has assisted 127,610 eligible legal permanent residents to become U.S. citizens. Since 1999, the Immigrant Family Resource Program has been instrumental in improving the lives of over 550,000 immigrant and refugees by connecting them to valuable and essential frontline services and breaking down the barriers to access to safety net services.

Increased ISLI funding would allow existing organizations to bolster their services whether for the New Americans Initiative (NAI) and/or the Immigrant Family Resource Program (IFRP) and provide support for new organizations seeking to meet the needs of growing communities in the suburbs and downstate.

**2. Provide funding for rapid response to immigration enforcement.** ICIRR established the Family Support Network and Hotline in 2011, at the time, the first of its kind hotline. The ICIRR Family Support Network and Deportation Hotline are a life vest for families in crisis who need a wide range of support. The purpose of the ICIRR Family Support Network (FSN) and Hotline is

to unify, build and coordinate a full range of support – legal, social services, ministry, and political empowerment – for families being torn apart by deportations. The Family Support Hotline provides critical services by providing callers information and referral information to a rapid response team near them. This service has served more than 12,000 families since it launched in 2011, and has allowed for community members to respond to deportation crises quicker and more effectively. The hotline, however, is supported by limited private grant funding and staffed by volunteers. ISLI funding for rapid response would allow for broader and deeper outreach, consistent staffing, and more robust referrals to support services, with a particular focus on protecting suburban immigrant families. This project will serve as a model for more communities, particularly in the Chicago suburbs and downstate, to provide immediate response to those impacted by aggressive raids and tactics.

Local groups of volunteers called “Family Support Teams” are prepared to assist families in deportation with basic needs such as food and transportation. Family Support Teams operate under a growing Local Resource List that consists of people and organizations that can help provide food, transportation, emotional support, and child care to individuals facing deportation. Family Support Teams are also integral in our efforts to fight deportations through campaigns, as well as to provide community outreach and rights education.

**3. Provide funding for legal representation.** ISLI could provide funding for more legal resources for immigrants who need to defend against deportation or want to apply for citizenship, green cards, humanitarian relief, or other protection. Such resources could be organized in one of several ways:

- Enabling community organizations to hire staff attorneys to provide or oversee citizenship and immigration legal services
- Staffing the help desk at immigration court more consistently and robustly
- Providing representation at immigration bond hearings (supporting a project already organized by AILA and NIJC)
- Providing representation for immigration detainees held in Illinois county jails under ICE contracts (somewhat similar to the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project)

**4. Specify ICIRR as the administrator of ISLI.** ICIRR has administered ISLI for 20 years and has built up a strong consistent record of high-quality program management, training, and coordination. Naming ICIRR in the human services appropriations legislation should streamline the grantmaking process for ISLI funds, and thus allow program partners to execute contracts and receive grants more promptly and without unnecessary interruptions.