

THE IMMIGRANT ADVOCATE

TEACHING, INTERPRETING, AND CHANGING LAW SINCE 1979



← WINTER

2023

THE ILRC'S FIGHT AGAINST OPERATION LONE STAR

A MESSAGE FROM THE TEXAS TEAM

Operation Lone Star, also known as OLS, is a racist and unconstitutional Texas law enforcement operation that targets Black and Brown migrants for arrest, jail, and deportation devised by Gov. Greg Abbott in March of 2021. Since its inception, Gov. Abbott has wasted nearly 5 billion dollars of Texans' taxes to fund this racist scheme. The ILRC is vehemently opposed to OLS.

The ILRC's Texas Team continues joining grassroots and statewide efforts to share the negative impact of anti-immigrant bills, focusing on community education, and supporting coalition efforts to moderate and lead discussions around OLS, including understanding the history and effects of the policy. With our new and expanded reach in Laredo, we have hosted sit-ins with the community to explain OLS and expect to expand those community sessions throughout the year and beyond, as needed. We are bringing our message directly to politicians from local and Texas-wide seats at a special San Antonio event to share information about OLS and increase our reach on the topic. This fall, we stood alongside our partners at the Texas Civil Rights Project to host a Dia De Los Muertos memorial altar at the Capitol in Austin, Texas to commemorate the lives of migrants who have lost their lives to OLS and Abbott's cruel policies.

Since the launch of OLS, thousands of migrants have been apprehended and charged with "trespassing," and we have received reports that people of color have been charged with smuggling. However, there is mounting evidence that Texas law enforcement agencies are fabricating these bogus charges. For example, numerous

accounts detail how law enforcement officers direct migrants to enter specific plots of private property, in a ruse to intentionally arrest them for trespassing. Despite a Texas District Judge ruling that OLS is unconstitutional in 2022, the discriminatory arrest practices continue as migrants are placed in state prisons and deprived of due process. These state prisons are notorious for their inhumane conditions and abuse from jail staff. Migrant defendants are often coerced into pleading guilty in exchange for release from criminal custody. However, upon their release from criminal custody, migrants are directly transferred to federal immigration authorities for further detention and deportation.

This past summer, Gov. Abbott installed buoys and concertina razor wire in the Rio Grande and along its riverbank causing not only irreparable harm to the environment, but also causing the death of at least four people and severely injuring hundreds of others. Despite a Texas District judge granting an injunction and ruling that the buoys need to be removed from the Mexico side of the river, the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals issued a stay. The buoys remain in place for now, but this legal fight continues.

The city of Eagle Pass became the epicenter of OLS when Mayor Salinas, with the help of the County Attorney, Jaime Iracheta, unilaterally and illegally declared Shelby Park, a public park, as private. Declaring Shelby Park as private property facilitated the Texas State Troopers' tactic of deceiving migrants into walking onto Shelby Park and, instead of encountering Customs and Border Protection to turn themselves in as they were promised, Texas State


CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Troopers arrested the migrants for criminal trespass. In addition to Texas State Troopers lying to migrants, they simultaneously began separating families—just like we saw happen under the Trump Administration—with no promise of reunification. On August 1, the ILRC, alongside advocates from Eagle Pass and other parts of Texas, united to fight back against these heinous acts and demanded that the Eagle Pass City Council vote to rescind the affidavit. In a rare win, the City Council of Eagle Pass voted *unanimously* to rescind the affidavit: Shelby Park was no longer private. However, despite this victory, Mayor Salinas has defied the City Council and signed a new affidavit making Shelby Park private property once again.

Migrants continue to be held in state prisons unjustly and are forced to plead guilty to bogus charges. Texas State Troopers continue taking over private property without landowners' permission to continue their arrest to deportation pipeline. What's worse is that some Texas elected officials are not standing up and fighting back against OLS. Instead, some are buying into the concocted rhetoric that Texas is being invaded and are authoring some of the most anti-immigrant bills.

You may ask, how is the ILRC pushing back against these punitive policies and tactics? We are speaking out and providing testimony against OLS at public hearings held at the Capitol in Austin, Texas. Staff and partners are attending federal court hearings on the deadly installation of the buoys along the Rio Grande River to

bear witness to this historic inhumanity. Staff and our amazing Texas and national partners are asking for help from congressional legislators. Finally, we are utilizing the power and reach of social media to launch campaigns decrying Operation Lone Star and calling for its end. For example, we partnered with Human Rights Watch who produced educational videos on OLS and placed them on social media to continue to educate the public. In October, the Lost River Film Festival in San Marcos, Texas invited the ILRC's Texas Team to moderate and host a film block dedicated to independent films about immigration. We were able to educate the audience on OLS and highlight how these anti-immigrant policies tie all our struggles together. Finally, we recently bolstered our Texas team with the addition of an organizer based in Laredo, Texas, a hotbed of punitive immigration activity. The ILRC is committed to expanding the reach of our work fighting OLS.

For ILRC staff residing in Texas as well as all Texans who believe that immigrants and their families should be able to stay together in this country and thrive, we must hold our state representatives accountable and urge the Biden Administration to intervene to end this racist and unconstitutional scheme. We implore anyone reading this to join us in this fight to let Texas know that we see their xenophobia and racism and to fight back against anti-immigrant policies that get introduced in your cities and states. 

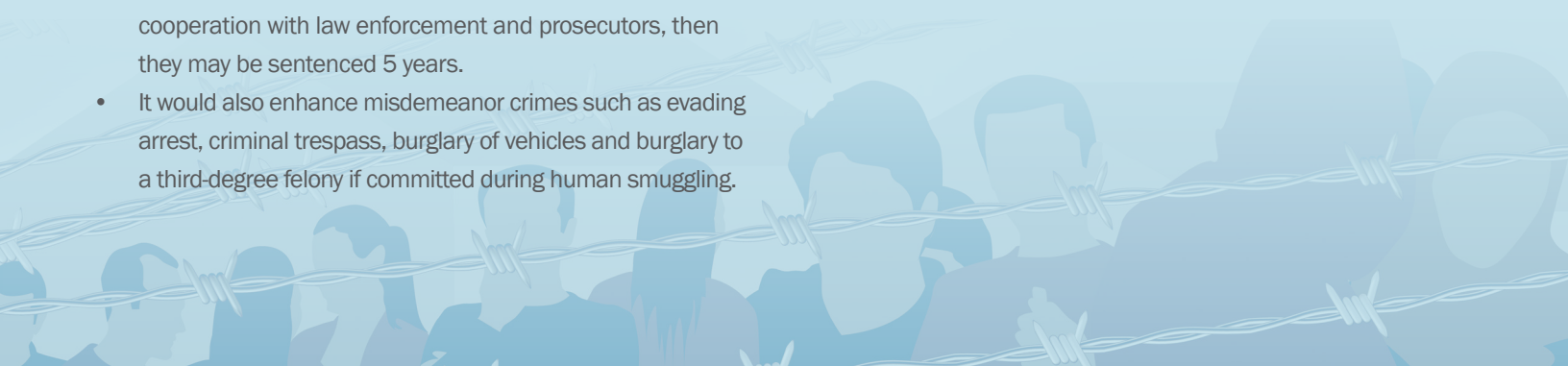
SB 4: ENHANCING CRIMINAL PENALTIES

SOME OF WHAT SB 4 DOES

- An extension of OLS-related policy, SB would create mandatory minimums for human smuggling and operating a stash house.
- The mandatory penalty for human smuggling would be 10 years imprisonment; if the individual provides significant cooperation with law enforcement and prosecutors, then they may be sentenced 5 years.
- It would also enhance misdemeanor crimes such as evading arrest, criminal trespass, burglary of vehicles and burglary to a third-degree felony if committed during human smuggling.

AN EXAMPLE OF SB4 HARMS TEXANS

- [According to Human Rights Watch](#), nearly 80% of those booked for smuggling were US citizens with a median age of 26. At least 12 minors have been arrested for or charged with smuggling between 2021 and March 2023.



SHARING BEST PRACTICES & FELLOWSHIP:

NAC'S NATIONAL NATURALIZATION PRACTITIONERS CONFERENCE

The New Americans Campaign (NAC) held its National Naturalization Practitioners' Conference on October 12-13, 2023, in Houston, TX. The conference gathered NAC partner organizations from around the country to lift up and share best practices that partners can use to deliver effective naturalization services in diverse communities.

Approximately 260 people attended this year's conference, which was a peer-to-peer, network-building, best practices exchange. Conference sessions included panels on policy, working with volunteers, fundraising, civic engagement, naturalization workshops, technology, and much more. The conference also included legal trainings on crimes and naturalization and on how absences can affect naturalization. After the conference, Houston NAC partners hosted a naturalization workshop where conference attendees provided legal services to applicants for citizenship.

One attendee shared this feedback:

This was my first NAC conference (and first conference ever) and I had a great time. All organizers and presenters were kind and accessible. I felt supported and heard and I learned so much! Being in one room with so many people who care for our immigrant neighbors and value their contributions to our communities was validating and extremely inspiring! Thank you so very much, I hope I can participate many more times!

The New Americans Campaign is made up of approximately 200 partner organizations in over 20 locations around the country. Since 2011, NAC partners have:

- Completed over 606,000 naturalization applications,
- Completed over 213,000 fee waivers and reduced fee requests,
- Saved the immigrant community over \$665 million in legal and application fees, and
- Held over 10,600 naturalization events.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aSuTTqpzOWo>



FROM SLAVERY TO DEPORTATION: REFLECTING ON THE ROOTS OF IMMIGRATION INJUSTICE & THE MODERN CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM



Our trip to the Equal Justice Initiative's Legacy Museum and Memorial left an imprint in our minds and hearts. The museum analyzes the legacy of slavery in America, from the transatlantic slave trade, to the violently suppressed post-Civil War Reconstruction Era, through the era of racial terror and Jim Crow, leading to the Civil Rights movement, and ending in our current era of mass incarceration. Because these horrific periods in our nation's history are so artfully presented—through photography, music, video, and art which feels larger than life—you can't help but be engulfed in the history. These moments offered a powerful opportunity to reflect on the centuries of racism and oppression which informed the roots of the systems we continue to fight today.

Three of us who traveled together to Montgomery, Alabama are a part of ILRC's Enforcement team, which works to protect immigrants, including those with criminal histories, from arrest to detention and deportation. Much of our work focuses on disentangling law enforcement from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE,) which relies on this relationship for the jail to deportation pipeline. The Legacy Museum resonated so deeply with our work because it clearly demonstrates how our modern-day criminal system is rooted in the origins of slavery. Because of this, the same problems in the criminal legal system that lead to mass incarceration of Black people lead to disproportionate rates of deportation for Black migrants. The Legacy Museum was an important reminder of the long, historical context of displacement, forced migration, and over-policing that we continue to fight in our work today.

The trip to Montgomery helps motivate and inform the work that the ILRC does today. We visited the home where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. lived and the church where he ministered during the Montgomery bus boycott. We were reminded how young some of the leaders and organizers were, and it motivated us to continue educating and organizing others, especially the youth. We visited the Rosa Parks Museum, where we saw how the modest demands of the early civil rights movement were fought with hostility by those who sought to uphold white supremacy. It reinforced that we need to advocate for what is best for our community because even modest requests will be too much for those who want to disenfranchise others. We saw how women were vital to the success of organizing thousands for a boycott, and it reminded us that no movement can succeed without organizing.

In a fitting end to our trip, we visited the Freedom Rides Museum and saw how blatantly companies and elected officials violated court orders, and how it took courageous Black people and their allies to put their bodies on the line to enforce change. The Freedom Riders reminded us of the law's limitations, and of the importance of organizing. We were reminded that being on the right side of history often requires courageous stances, especially when others are asking you to keep a false peace. As we at the ILRC take on unjust laws, we will continue to draw inspiration from the leaders whose legacies we visited in Montgomery.

-Grisel Ruiz, Jehan Lenar, & Lena Graber

The EJI Legacy Museum and Memorial gave me something I had started to lose sight of—hope. It may seem odd to use that word because the day was filled with such vivid, potent reminders of the ugliness from which this country was formed. But what I also took is that within the darkest moments, there are stories of resilience and of resistance. The Museum did a powerful job of bringing to life the stories of Black leaders who organized their communities, often putting their bodies on the line to pave

the way toward freedom. As an attorney, I felt renewed hope in seeing the power of organizing even when all the cards seem stacked against you. During the prior administration and even today, I often feel that the cards are stacked against immigrant communities. It can be hard to see a path forward when every policy win has to be defended ten times over and, in certain states, we've taken ten steps back. Yet I walked out of this trip reminded that folks have faced even more treacherous

obstacles and it's because those leaders didn't give up that we have progress from which to build today.

This trip was also a crucial reminder of the importance of centering the Black experience and acknowledging the racism etched into the bones of our modern-day criminal system, which informs the way detention and deportation exists today. Dismantling these systems will not be possible without reckoning with this history at every step.

-Grisel Ruiz



2023 BURTON AWARDS: A CELEBRATION OF IMMIGRANTS' RIGHTS CHAMPIONS

After producing virtual programs during the spring of 2021 and 2022 and returning to our first in-person event during the fall of 2022, the ILRC had the privilege of gathering in person again on May 18 to celebrate the 2023 Phillip Burton Immigration & Civil Rights Awards. It was a joy to return to an in-person event to recognize our honorees for their notable work in the immigration legal and advocacy fields. Our emcee for the evening was Aidín Castillo, Executive Director of the UC Immigrant Legal Services Center and current ILRC board member. Aidín previously worked as an ILRC attorney in Washington, D.C. where she established the Immigrant Legal Resource Center's national policy office.

The 2023 Burton Awards honored the following advocates for their formidable work in the fight for immigrant rights: Congresswoman Judy Chu, Professor Gerald López, and the Black Alliance for Just Immigration.

We were thrilled to have almost 350 guests come from across the nation to join us in this celebration. If you were not able to attend, we welcome you to visit our [website](#) to read more about the honorees, see the latest work of the ILRC, and to make a donation in support of our efforts.

This celebration would not have been possible without our amazing sponsors and supporters. With their commitment and dedication, we are able to continue to fight for immigrants' rights and fairer immigration policies in the United States. We are also thankful for ILRC's board members' generosity as they provided a \$30,000 one-to-one match for the event.

Thank you to everyone who supported the 2023 Burton Awards. We look forward to seeing you next year on Thursday, May 23, 2024.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS DEPARTURES & PASSINGS IN 2023

The ILRC relies on the experience, knowledge, and guidance from its Board of Directors to ensure that the ILRC fulfills its organizational mission so that immigrants and their families can stay together in this country and thrive. We are lucky to have some truly dedicated and passionate board members, and we would like to take a moment to acknowledge some recent departures and passings.

Michelle Mercer and Roger Wu announced their resignations from the board in 2023, leaving the ILRC in very capable hands while they contribute their talents to other important causes. Michelle joined the board in 2014 and has been invaluable as a member of the Development Committee. Under her leadership, the ILRC's individual giving efforts have become more strategic and our annual Burton Awards event has grown into an eagerly anticipated annual gala

for like-minded business and community leaders, immigration rights advocates, and immigration law practitioners. We thank Michelle for her years of service and immeasurable contributions. Roger joined the board in 2005 and has left an indelible mark on his fellow board members and staff because of his keen and astute insights on immigration issues, his sophisticated yet approachable leadership style, and the no-nonsense realistic perspective he provided on a wide range of matters. His leadership on the board's Executive Committee, his advocacy for immigrant youth, and his unwavering support will be missed by the staff and board alike.

The ILRC also remembers the passing of two stalwarts of its board. We remember the lasting legacies and formidable contributions of Eva Grove and Alan Tafapolsky. Eva joined the board in 2009 and was a kind, warm,

smart, thoughtful, politically progressive, dedicated, and helpful person. She cared deeply about immigration, humanity, the ILRC, and the ILRC's staff. She was an exemplary board member who stepped up to the plate time and time again offering her wonderful ideas, useful and practical suggestions, endless time and energy, and constant and consistent support. She was a valuable member of the ILRC's Executive Committee and was Chair of the Finance Committee. Alan was a great board member, joining in 2015. With a background in business immigration law, he provided sage counsel on issues ranging from finance to human resources to immigration law. Alan was a warm person, great friend, and loyal colleague. He is missed by all. May Eva and Alan's memory always be a blessing to everyone that they touched.



Thank You!

BY CYNTHIA TIRADO HOUSEL

I recently had the chance to visit my colleagues in Texas who are all doing really challenging and amazing work in a state whose government is very inhospitable toward migrants. The visit opened my eyes to the magnitude of the struggle for immigrants' rights in Texas. I am in awe of the commitment and passion my colleagues fighting for immigrants' rights in Texas.

The ILRC's expansion into Texas in 2018 was a result of growing attacks on migrants in the state. Key leaders in Texas' immigrants' rights field asked our staff to join them to fight back against horrible and punitive legislation. The ILRC's Board of Directors committed to expanding into Texas. Because of the generous support of donors like you, we now have offices in San Antonio, Houston, Austin, and Laredo. Your investment in the ILRC provided the resources needed to expand our reach into Texas and partner with national, statewide, and grassroots organizations and community members to fight back against unreasonably harsh policies targeting immigrants and immigrant communities. The financial commitment you provide to the ILRC enables us to mobilize more quickly, organize more effectively, and amplify the message of communities to lawmakers that immigrants

deserve the right to reside in this country with their families and thrive.

There is so much injustice happening globally, but we must not forget that immigrants in this country have been suffering for too long under those who would use and misuse laws to punish immigrants. The ILRC has always advocated for fairer and more just immigration policies no matter which administration is in power. We do this because it is right and because we have the support of community members and donors like you.

We have a great and deep appreciation for your commitment as we stand together for justice for immigrants in Texas and across the country. Your financial support is a vote of confidence for the work that we do. We cannot do any of this without you.

If you have not made a gift to the ILRC this year, we invite you to visit our website at ilrc.org/donate-now or to use the envelope included in this newsletter. Have a wonderful holiday season and Happy New Year,

Cynthia Tirado House
Director of Leadership Giving

UPDATED PUBLICATIONS



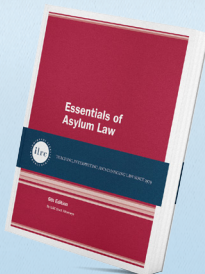
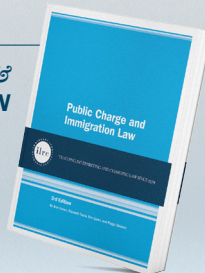
In 1984, the ILRC published its first manual. Since then, the ILRC has been providing essential practical guides for legal practitioners. All publications are produced by the ILRC's expert immigration attorneys. Revenue from the ILRC publications helps support critical programs in the community.

To learn about these titles and view our entire catalog, visit WWW.ILRC.ORG/STORE



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ILRC publications bring clarity to complicated issues. **Save time. Win more cases.**

12 YEARS OF IMPACT AND SUCCESS

OVER

606,000

naturalization applications
completed since July 2011

OVER

\$665,000,000

saved for aspiring citizens and their families
in legal and application fees

OVER

213,000

fee waivers and reduced fee requests
completed since July 2011

OVER

10,600

naturalization events held since July 2011, including
naturalization information sessions, volunteer
trainings, and group application workshops

Led by the Immigrant Legal Resource Center, the New Americans Campaign is a diverse nonpartisan national network of respected immigration organizations, legal services providers, faith-based organizations, immigrant rights groups, foundations, and community leaders. The Campaign transforms the way aspiring citizens navigate the path to becoming new Americans. It is committed to connecting lawful permanent residents to trusted legal assistance and critical information that simplifies the naturalization process.



WWW.NEWAMERICANSCAMPAIGN.ORG

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- Visiting our [More Ways to Give](#) page to learn about additional ways to support the ILRC

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Your gift will support the ILRC and the immigrant community.

Questions? Contact Cynthia Tirado Housel, Director of Leadership Giving, at (415) 321-8570.

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