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540 Heights Blvd
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ilrc@ilrc.org

www.ilrc.org



HB 1554 Testimony Immigrant Legal Resource Center Priscilla Olivarez, Senior Policy Attorney and Strategist Apr 28, 2025

My name is Priscilla Olivarez, and I am a Senior Policy Attorney with the Immigrant Legal Resource Center and I am from San Antonio, Texas. I submit this written testimony in opposition to House Bill 1554 because I believe every person should be afforded due process regardless of their legal status. House Bill 1554 is an affront to the principle of due process. House Bill 1554 is also an affront to the autonomy of localities who have chosen to invest in protecting their communities from unjust outcomes by creating immigrant legal defense funds.

In 2022, Bexar County identified the urgent need to help protect individuals and families who had strong claims for legal relief, but who were at risk of deportation merely because they could not afford an attorney. Bexar County also recognized immigrants are vital to our local economy, contributing \$19 billion annually in state and local taxes.¹ For these reasons, Bexar County chose to invest in our communities and create an immigrant legal defense fund (ILDF) to protect families from deportation. The Bexar County ILDF has represented clients who have strong ties to Texas. Many of these clients are breadwinners of their household with U.S. citizen children. Because of the Bexar ILDF, these families have an opportunity to stay together and be free from potential harm. Now, HB 1554 attempts to prohibit Bexar County from continuing to provide these vital funds and seeks to strip localities of their decision-making power to determine how to best spend our local tax dollars in ways that align with our community's values.

We are in a pivotal moment. At the same time the state seeks to deprive individuals and families of legal defense funds, the federal government is committing unjust, illegal, and fast-tracked deportations. Now more than ever, legal defense funds are critical to protect Texans. If this committee values due process, keeping families together, and respecting the right of our localities to self-govern, this committee must vote no on House Bill 1554.

¹ American Immigration Council, "Map the Impact," accessed March 28, 2025, <https://map.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/locations/texas>.