



**TEACHING, INTERPRETING,
& CHANGING LAW SINCE 1979**

AFTER 30 YEARS OF HARM, IT'S TIME FOR A NEW WAY FORWARD.

THE 1996 IMMIGRATION LAWS CHANGED EVERYTHING

Thirty years ago, Congress passed two laws that reshaped the U.S. immigration system: the **Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act** and the **Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act**. Together, they are often called the **1996 immigration laws**.

These laws made it easier for the government to detain, deport, and permanently separate immigrants from their families. They expanded fast-track deportations, limited the power of judges to consider people's full lives and circumstances, increased mandatory detention, and made old convictions a basis for deportation.

The result has been devastating: more incarceration, more deportation, more family separation, and more fear in immigrant communities.

THESE LAWS WERE BUILT ON CRIMINALIZATION

The 1996 immigration laws were passed shortly after the 1994 crime bill, during a time when politicians across the country embraced "tough on crime" policies. Those policies fueled mass incarceration, overpolicing, and racial profiling, especially in Black communities and other communities of color.

The 1996 laws brought that same punishment focus approach into the immigration system. They tangled immigration status more deeply to the criminal legal system and helped create what many communities experience today as an **arrest-to-deportation pipeline**.

For thirty years, policymakers on both parties have treated detention and deportation as answers to public safety. But deporting people, separating families and destabilizing communities does not make us safer. Real safety comes from housing, healthcare, education, living wages, dignity, and the ability of families to stay together.

WE REJECT THE “GOOD IMMIGRANT/BAD IMMIGRANT” DIVIDE

The 1996 laws helped normalize the idea that some immigrants are deserving of protection while others are disposable. We reject that.

No one should be permanently separated from their family because of a past mistake, a decades-old conviction, an arrest, or contact with a criminal legal system that already targets Black and Brown communities.

Our immigration system should be rooted in fairness, due process, dignity, and the belief that people can grow, change, contribute and belong.

OUR COMMUNITIES DESERVE A NEW WAY FORWARD

After thirty years of harm, we need a new path. We need policies that reject racism, xenophobia, anti-Blackness, criminalization, and mass deportation.

We call on community organizations, advocates, organizers, allies, and policymakers to join us in demanding a new bold vision for immigrant justice.

WE DEMAND:

- 1 End immigration detention** – No one should be jailed because of their immigration status. We must end mandatory detention, close detention centers, reject private prison contracts, and stop using warehouses to cage human beings.
- 2 Disentangle immigration from policing and the criminal legal system** – An arrest, charge, or conviction should not automatically become a pathway to deportation. We must end the arrest-to-deportation pipeline, stop immigration detainers, and roll back laws that impose double punishment and permanent exile.

- 3 End state and local participation in immigration enforcement** – Local police should not act as ICE agents. We must end 287(g) agreements, reject anti-immigrant state laws, stop racial profiling, and hold agencies accountable when they target immigrant communities.
- 4 Keep families and communities together** – We must end fast-track deportations, restore due process, expand immigration relief, allow people who have been deported to return home, and eliminate cruel bars that keep families separated for years or even permanently.

WHAT STATE AND LOCAL LEADERS CAN DO

State and local policymakers do not have to wait for Congress. They can act now by:

- rejecting immigration detention contracts and refusing new detention facilities;
- ending 287(g) agreements and limiting collaboration with ICE;
- strengthening sanctuary policies;
- reducing arrests through policies like cite-and-release;
- creating universal representation programs for people facing deportation;
- expanding post-conviction relief so people are not punished twice.

WHAT FEDERAL LEADERS CAN DO

Federal policymakers must address the root causes of today's deportation machine. They should:

- introduce and support the **New Way Forward Act**;
- reject criminalizing narratives about immigrants;
- stop using fear and punishment as answers to public safety;
- listen to directly impacted communities and build solutions rooted in dignity and justice.

JOIN US

Thirty years ago, politicians chose punishment, detention, deportation, and family separation.

For the next thirty years, we must choose something different. We choose dignity, due process, thriving community, families staying together. We choose a New Way Forward!