

# THE IMMIGRANT ADVOCATE

TEACHING, INTERPRETING, AND CHANGING LAW SINCE 1979

SUMMER

2020



## MESSAGE FROM THE ILRC

By Eric Cohen | ILRC Executive Director

### I came to the ILRC

in 1989. Originally, I had planned on staying for about a year before moving on to the next step in my career. After almost 31 years of hard, but rewarding work, I know that I am exactly where I am meant to be. There are many facets to immigration law and the one I chose to specialize in is naturalization.

For immigrants coming to this country, naturalization is the zenith of the immigration experience. Naturalizing means that an immigrant now holds the same title as people born in this country—United States citizen. Among the benefits of citizenship comes the great privilege and responsibility of voting in elections. Elections have consequences and while some elections create short-term, surmountable challenges, what we are currently experiencing will have consequences now and for generations to come.

**We owe it to the next generation to do what we can to fight for the fundamental right of citizenship and, by extension, the right to vote.**

America had long been known as a nation of immigrants. It was a point of pride. Today, the naturalization process is being weaponized. Delays in

processing naturalization applications means that fewer people are being afforded the protections of citizenship and fewer voices get to be heard on Election Day. Fee increases for applications as well as the dismantling of the fee waiver system are erecting barriers, hitting low-income and applicants of color the hardest.

Sadly, less than 60% of eligible voters cast ballots in 2016. With potential changes to the US Postal Service, voting by mail seems less reliable than it did only a few short weeks ago. The pandemic has also made casting one's vote in person a potential public health risk. Make no mistake that the barriers to voting that we are facing are by design. Voter suppression is a real danger this election cycle, and delays in the naturalization process contribute to this.

It is projected that the US will have a majority population of people of color by 2050 or sooner. That is one generation away. We owe it to the next generation to do what we can to fight for the fundamental right of citizenship and, by extension, the right to vote. My work at the ILRC and the work of the ILRC's project, the New Americans Campaign, are standing up to defend fair and equitable access to the naturalization process regardless of race or economic status. Join me in defending the naturalization process, so that all those who are eligible to call themselves citizens of this country can vote on November 3.





## ALL-VIRTUAL BURTON “EVENT” HONORS FRONTLINE HEROES

Among the many lessons we can take from the COVID-19 public health crisis is the importance of flexibility and creativity. The ILRC put both of these qualities into practice to produce an all-virtual Phillip Burton Immigration & Civil Rights Awards celebration in 2020. If you haven't [checked it out yet](#), you really will want to.

The 2020 Burton Awards collectively honored Immigrant Essential Workers with a brand new, Frontline Heroes Award. From securing our nation's food supply to providing life-saving healthcare services, immigrants are instrumental in keeping the critical infrastructure of our society running. We had the chance to learn a little about Dr. Jirayut “New” Latthivongskorn, DACA activist and the first undocumented medical student at UCSF, and Simitria Rendon, a farmworker in California's San Joaquin Valley, as they accepted the Frontline Heroes Award on behalf of all of the immigrants who are putting their safety on the line during the pandemic.

Because the Burton Awards is just not the same without connecting with the ILRC's staff, don't miss the [video](#) created to spotlight our work. Several ILRC attorneys and organizers are highlighted discussing their work and sharing words of inspiration. In our humble opinion, it's a video that speaks from and about the heart of the ILRC!

We're equally proud of the many sponsors and donors who stuck with us in 2020 and who are recognized on the [Burton Awards Sponsor Wall](#). These allies recognize that while the ILRC may have temporarily shut its offices, it hasn't shutdown the advocacy and teaching that we do on a day-to-day basis to protect and advance the rights immigrants. Among these supporters are the ILRC's own Board members who generously stepped up to encourage others to give with a \$30,000 one-to-one matching challenge. We are excited to announce that our match has been met, but it's not too late to [make a gift to the ILRC today](#).

And that brings us to another important lesson of the pandemic: We are all in this together—Board members, staff, immigrant essential workers, sponsors and allies. Our gratitude goes to all of you. Stay safe and healthy.

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# 2019

## ANNUAL REPORT



## MISSION

The mission of the Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC) is to work with and educate immigrants, community organizations, and the legal sector to continue to build a democratic society that values diversity and the rights of all people. The ILRC works with immigrants, community organizations, legal professionals, law enforcement, and policymakers to help improve the lives of immigrants. Our work on a broad range of issues directly impacts immigrant families and the community through our three program areas.



## MESSAGE FROM THE ILRC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

For the ILRC, 2019 proved to be another year difficult year for immigrants, their families, and those working in the immigrant rights movement. The current administration spent another year relentlessly targeting immigrants. Immigration issues were used as fodder for its base of support, which served to drive a wedge further into communities across this country. The administration proposed increasing service fees, making it harder for lower income immigrants to afford fees associated with applications. The administration also made it harder for immigrants to seek asylum in this country, forcing many asylum seekers at our southern border to wait in Mexico, often in deplorable and unsafe conditions. Perilous conditions at detention centers were exposed as media outlets reported on the deaths of detainees seeking an opportunity for a better life. This is not who this country is and the ILRC spent last year working with immigration legal practitioners, community organizations, and immigrants themselves

to champion fairer and more just immigration policies.

For over 40 years, the ILRC has relied on the financial support of individual and institutional funders to do the work that we do. You empower us to address not only the long view landscape for immigrant rights, but you enable us to rapidly mobilize to address the most critical immigration issues. There have been no shortage of crises since 2017, and we know that our work—now and going forward—shines a bright light on the benefits of immigration while pushing back against a myopic vision of this country that forgets its own history. We couldn't do this without your support and belief in our mission. For that, we are truly grateful.

Eric Cohen



# ILRC PROGRAM AREAS



## POLICY & ADVOCACY

Our policy advocacy work focuses on addressing inequalities in the immigration system, particularly for individuals who have had contact with the criminal legal system; expanding laws and policies to offer greater protections to immigrants; and ensuring more immigrants can access legal services and engage in the political process. ILRC attorneys and strategists are experts in the field of immigration law and immigrant rights campaigns. Through our advocacy efforts at the local, state, and federal levels, we work to achieve the ILRC's mission of a more inclusive and democratic society.



## CAPACITY BUILDING

We provide technical legal assistance, trainings, and publications to immigration law practitioners, pro bono attorneys, legal services organizations, and community-based organizations. The ILRC produces, updates, and publishes expert immigration practice manuals used by legal providers nationwide. Our catalog consists of 20 manuals. Our unique Attorney of the Day consultation service provides case-specific technical assistance to attorneys, nonprofit organizations, public defenders, and other immigration advocates. Our staff attorneys also conduct immigration law trainings on emerging issues, policy updates, and effective practices. One of our goals is to bolster the capacity of the immigration law field so that the field is better prepared to protect and defend its clients and the community.



## CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

We engage immigrants in mobilizing and raising their voices on issues critical to their communities.

The ILRC believes that one of the most important ways immigrants can protect their rights and the rights of their families is to naturalize. The ILRC leads a national project called the New Americans Campaign. Founded in 2011, the New Americans Campaign has helped over 446,000 people complete naturalization applications and held over 7,700 naturalization workshops across the country.

Other crucial projects of the ILRC are the Red Card program and the Know Your Rights (KYR) program. The ILRC's Red Cards help immigrants and citizens assert their constitutional rights and defend themselves in many situations, such as when ICE agents go to a home. The demand for Red Cards has substantially increased since 2016. The ILRC also hosts KYR presentations. These presentations give immigrants, their family members, companies employing immigrants, and others information essential to protecting themselves in an era of increased immigration status scrutiny, immigration enforcement, and deportations.







## POLICY HIGHLIGHT: ERIC COHEN'S TESTIMONY TO CAPITOL HILL

On July 16, 2019,  
Eric Cohen,  
Executive Director  
of the ILRC, joined  
representatives  
from the American  
Immigration  
Lawyers  
Association and

Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. to testify at the United States House of Representatives' Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration Hearing on Immigration Policy and Processing Delays.

This was a great opportunity for the ILRC to use its voice, a voice informed by over 40 years of experience and driven by a commitment to advocating for fair and just immigration policies. During the testimony, Eric entreated our elected representatives to hear about how the USCIS policy changes and processing delays negatively impact those seeking immigration benefits. Eric's immigration law expertise in naturalization, as well as the ILRC's leadership on the national naturalization project, the New Americans Campaign, made the ILRC uniquely positioned to share examples and stories from those affected by the backlogs and procedural changes.

Eric spoke about how the current administration's procedural changes, reallocation of resources, and application processing delays were contributing to a broken immigration system. He said, "USCIS's policy directives have shifted its mission from a benefit-granting agency to one that erects barriers and serves as enforcer.

"Citizenship is an important part of the foundation of our democracy, and we should all work to ensure that our naturalization process is administered fairly, efficiently, and reasonably."

Shortly before his testimony, Eric and other partner organization representatives held a press conference to reinforce the message that the naturalization system should be run efficiently and effectively and the currently administration should cut naturalization backlogs down to a reasonable level.

**"Citizenship is an important part of the foundation of our democracy, and we should all work to ensure that our naturalization process is administered fairly, efficiently, and reasonably."**



On Tuesday, July 16, Eric Cohen joined representatives from the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) and Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC) to shed light on how USCIS policy changes and processing delays are negatively impacting those seeking immigration benefits and our country as a whole.

**To watch Eric's full oral testimony, go to:**

[bit.ly/uscisdelaytestimony](https://bit.ly/uscisdelaytestimony)



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# JOINING THE ILRC FAMILY



## **Medha Chandra** | Associate Director for the New Americans Campaign

Medha Chandra joined the ILRC in August 2020 as Associate Director for the New Americans Campaign. She works with national and local organizations to facilitate an increase in the number of lawful permanent residents applying for naturalization. Prior to joining the ILRC, Medha worked as an organizer and policy advocate for an international nonprofit working in the agriculture and food sector, where she worked closely with undocumented farmworkers. Medha obtained her Doctoral degree in Urban Governance from University College London, UK and has a Masters in Urban Design from School of Planning and Architecture, India. She has lived in the San Francisco Bay Area for the past 16 years. She enjoys learning and teaching Indian classical dance and performs occasionally at dance festivals across the Bay Area.



## **Donna De La Cruz** | Communications Director

Donna De La Cruz joined the ILRC in July 2020 as the organization's first Communications Director. She oversees strategy for the communications program, provides messaging guidance, project management, and serves as a liaison with the media. Prior to joining the ILRC, Donna served as a communications leader for nearly a decade for several nonprofits, including Community Change where she led the bulk of the organization's earned media strategy on issues including immigration reform and economic justice, and oversaw the work of the Fair Immigration Reform Movement. Donna is a former Associated Press journalist, working in several bureaus including New York City and Washington, DC. Donna is a graduate of Arizona State University and is based in the Washington, DC office.



## **Mollie Esposito-Cerros** | Development Coordinator

Mollie Esposito-Cerros joined the ILRC as the Development Coordinator in September 2020. Mollie supports the ILRC's ongoing goals of donor engagement and stewardship. Previously, Mollie worked at the Orange County Community Foundation as the Donor Relations & Programs Officer. In that role, Mollie served as the Philanthropic Advisor for several Donor-Advised Funds and Nonprofit Endowment Funds. She also developed community initiatives including a Workforce Development initiative and a replicable Online Fundraising program. Mollie received her JD at Loyola Marymount University and a BA in English Literature from the University of Missouri. In her free time, Mollie enjoys reading, crafting, and spending time with her family.



## **Naiyolis Palomo** | Texas Campaign and Partnerships Strategist

Ashley Munro joined the ILRC in April 2020 as the Office Manager and Executive Assistant to the Executive Director and Deputy Director. Before joining the ILRC, Ashley worked for Boys & Girls Clubs of San Francisco's Tenderloin Clubhouse. She spent almost 10 years serving in the Tenderloin and became deeply connected to the community and families with whom she worked. While working in the Tenderloin, some of her passions were to help families advocate for themselves and support students in reaching their educational potential. When Ashley is not at work, she enjoys cheering on the Giants and 49ers and spending time with friends and family.



## **Sandy Valenciano** | Andy Grove Immigrants' Rights Fellow

Sandy Valenciano joined the ILRC in May 2020 as the new Andy Grove Fellow. She is the ILRC's first California Organizer. She is bridging criminalization and decarceration efforts and strengthening the collaborations between legal advocates and community organizers in order to advance campaigns that reimagine community safety and wellness. She is the former Executive Director of the California Immigrant Youth Justice Alliance, a statewide undocumented-youth-led organization, where she invested in building the leadership and organizing capacity of criminalized communities throughout the state of California. Sandy obtained a BA from Sonoma State University and hopes to become a clinical therapist.



## **Valerie Zukin** | Special Projects Attorney

Valerie Anne Zukin joined the ILRC in June 2020 as a Special Projects Attorney. Prior to joining the ILRC, Valerie served as the Legal Director for the California Collaborative for Immigrant Justice (CCLJ), a regional collaborative for detained immigrant representation comprised of legal service providers providing pro bono detained representation in Northern and Central California. In this role, Valerie facilitated sharing best practices and strategy around litigation and advocacy, provided technical assistance and training, served as the lead coordinator for the AILA Mesa Verde Pro Bono Project for recent-arrival asylum seekers, and administered the pro bono Attorney of the Day Program for the detained dockets at the San Francisco Immigration Court. She practiced at Van Der Hout, Brigagliano & Nightingale from 2011 to 2017, and the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project from 2007 to 2011, where she represented clients in complex immigration matters before the immigration agencies and federal courts. Valerie received her BA from Haverford College and her JD from Tulane University Law School. Valerie is fluent in Spanish.

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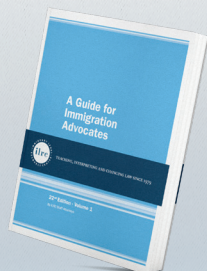


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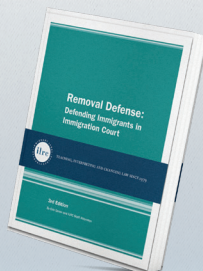


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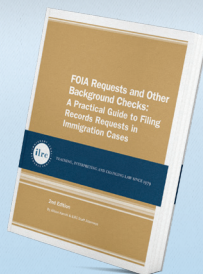
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OVER

**402,000**

citizenship applications completed since July 2011

OVER

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

OVER

**132,000**

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OVER

**7,100**

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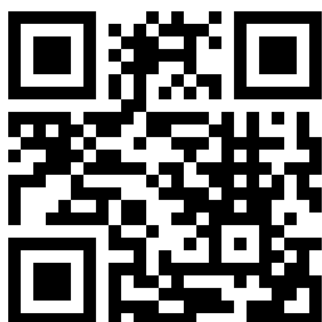
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