



Immigrant Legal Resource Center In Texas: Advancing Local Policies and Building Capacity to Promote Immigrant Rights & Criminal Justice

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The Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC) builds a democratic society that values diversity and the rights of all people. Through the ILRC's policy and advocacy efforts, we promote a vision of racial justice that advances the rights of all immigrants, including those who have had contact with the criminal legal system. In Texas, our work focuses on building capacity and passing and implementing local policies that dismantle the arrest-to-deportation pipeline and decriminalize immigrants, Black people, and other communities of color. To further this goal, the ILRC's Texas team employs an array of strategies to advocate for local policies and cultivate partnerships that promote immigrant rights and criminal justice, undercut the impact of one of our nation's most regressive anti-immigrant laws, SB 4, and build power for long-term wins.

Building the Foundation for Truly Intersectional Work



Through trainings, webinars, workshops, facilitated strategy sessions, intensive coaching, and the development of resources, the ILRC strengthens advocates' understanding of the intersections between the criminal and immigration systems. To foster deeper relationships between immigrant rights and criminal justice activists, the ILRC conducts values-based workshops to create alignment among these fields. The ILRC also convenes intersectional strategy conversations about the criminal legal system's impact on immigrants.

Nurturing Effective Coalitions

The ILRC convenes and facilitates immigrant rights coalitions in San Antonio and Houston. The ILRC supports these coalitions by cultivating leadership and shared facilitation, providing strategy consultation, supporting campaign development and implementation, providing legal and policy expertise, creating resources, supporting communications needs, and building model policy platforms. By devoting capacity to nurture these coalitions, the ILRC ensures there is local power led by those



directly impacted in the community to influence elected officials and achieve necessary change in local policy.

Winning Policy Change



Building on ILRC's publication, [*Moving Texas Forward: Local Policies Towards Inclusive Justice*](#), which provides a comprehensive menu of local policies on topics ranging from local criminal legal system reforms, prosecutorial accountability, public defense, measures to reduce arrests, ending contracts with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and increasing access to services for immigrants, the ILRC supports local coalitions and advocates to campaign for policy change. After a policy win is secured, we support our partners to carefully monitor implementation, as well as address concerns and push for improvements with local officials and other stakeholders.

Shifting the Narrative

The ILRC is dedicated to amplifying a counternarrative to mass incarceration, interior enforcement, and deportation, and dispelling the false dichotomy of the good versus bad immigrant. Through strategic and regular press outreach and social media engagement, we seek to counteract the harmful narrative of criminalization in Texas and promote a narrative grounded in inclusivity, dignity, and racial justice.

Building Legal Capacity in Texas

The ILRC conducts trainings for immigration legal service providers and criminal defense attorneys. As a hub for immigration enforcement, there is a greater need for the Texas legal community to defend individuals facing deportation. In 2021-22, we will continue to provide our webinars on immigration law topics to Texas nonprofit organizations and public defenders at no cost and conduct a comprehensive removal defense training for Houston-area practitioners. We also train and create resources for criminal defense attorneys on best practices for representing noncitizen defendants, immigration enforcement within jails, and how to challenge illegal ICE practices, and we partner with public defender offices to offer "know your rights" information for defendants.

Fostering Cohesion Among Advocates Across the State

The ILRC supports immigrant rights and criminal justice advocates across the state to build strength and cohesion by facilitating weekly statewide advocate calls, engaging speakers to discuss and present on various topics, and developing a cohort of community leaders who respond to anti-immigrant and criminalizing attacks in Texas. We continuously encourage collaboration among local organizers and advocates to ensure alignment in values and on local campaigns.

Examples of ILRC's Success in Texas

San Antonio and Bexar County

Through our work growing the SA Stands coalition in San Antonio, we won a cite and release diversion policy in Bexar County, thereby reducing the number of immigrants arrested and funneled into deportation. SA Stands has organized against child detention by blocking the opening of new child detention facilities and raising awareness about a local emergency influx facility detaining 2,000 children, thereby ensuring accountability and transparency, and preventing extension of the facility contract. We also pushed for the City of San Antonio to offer an enhanced library card, which acts as an alternative to traditional government-issued forms of ID that may not be available to undocumented immigrants and other vulnerable populations.

San Marcos and Hays County

Through our intensive capacity building support to Mano Amiga, a local community-based organization, we authored and won the first cite and release ordinance in Texas, which went into effect in 2020 in San Marcos. The ordinance seeks to reduce arrests and deportations by directing police officers to utilize alternatives to arrest for individuals accused of citation-eligible offenses, such as possession of small quantities of marijuana, petty theft, and traffic offenses, which are common drivers of the arrest-to-deportation pipeline.

Austin and Travis County

The ILRC helped to write Austin's "Freedom City" resolutions, and we have monitored their implementation through regular participation in the Freedom City working group. The resolutions have greatly reduced arrests in Austin and uplifted immigrants' constitutional rights during encounters with local law enforcement. In addition, we exposed legal issues around how the Austin Police Department shares records with ICE.

Houston and Harris County

Along with our partners in Harris County, we defeated the District Attorney's request for a \$20 million budget increase, thereby preventing increased prosecutions. Instead, we ensured some of these funds were redirected to the County's Public Defender's office to hire immigration experts. The ILRC was also a key player in pushing Harris County to create an immigration legal services fund, distributing \$2 million in funding to nonprofit immigration legal service providers to provide removal defense for low-income Harris County immigrant residents, particularly those who are detained. This fund, the largest of its kind in Texas, will increase access to legal counsel for individuals in Harris County who are facing deportation.