

RE: Long Beach Justice Fund

Honorable Mayor and City Council
Long Beach City Council
411 W. Ocean Blvd.
Long Beach, CA 90802

September 6, 2022

Dear Mayor Garcia and members of the Long Beach City Council,

We write to you in strong support of expanding the Long Beach Justice Fund and providing \$1 million for this fiscal year. Long Beach – like Los Angeles and countless cities across the country – is the product of immigrant labor and culture. The impact of deportation is devastating. Publicly funded programs like the Justice Fund are crucial in our collective struggle to ensure that working families are protected and empowered to live with dignity, without fear.

Having legal assistance is the single most important factor that determines whether or not a person will succeed in their immigration case. Without a lawyer, working-class folks have little to no hope of successfully navigating a complex and confusing legal system. This is true both in the deportation context *and* in the context of applying for various kinds of visas and protections through US Citizenship and Immigration Services. Many community members we organize are subject to being placed in proceedings at any point – applying for affirmative forms of protection is a way to prevent deportation proceedings from beginning in the first place. Removing the looming threat of deportation and the uncertainty that comes with undocumented status will provide community members with the agency and security they need to live full lives.

As a labor policy organization, we must also emphasize that it is much harder for employers to exploit workers when they have lawful status. Bargaining power, wages, and workers' quality of life all increase when they do not face the threat of deportation. Likewise, workers whose spouses or other family members are undocumented have more freedom to organize and more power in the workplace when they know their families will not be torn apart by ICE.

Last year, we conducted an issue survey and spoke with hundreds of Long Beach residents. When asked about immigration, residents expressed overwhelming support for a pathway to citizenship for undocumented folks. Hundreds of residents also expressed interest in more information on the Justice Fund to pass along to loved ones directly impacted by this issue.

One resident, who is an immigrant herself, had a neighbor who moved out of their building out of fear that they would be targeted or removed because of their undocumented status. We encounter renters who are afraid to advocate for themselves with their landlords for the same

reasons. Another tragic story we came across was a community member who had to take in her 11 and 2 year-old nephews after her sister was deported. She felt deeply unprepared to suddenly raise two children alone after never having any of her own.

Everyone deserves the right to free universal legal representation, especially when faced with the threat of separation from their homes and loved ones. Since 2018, the Justice Fund has funded defense for folks who have been criminalized and detained by ICE. This is huge, but we know it does not meet the needs of our communities. Now is the time to strengthen the program by expanding legal assistance to survivors of crime and domestic violence, to folks struggling with Ninth Circuit appeals, and by formally incorporating a holistic approach to immigration support.

For this reason, we urge the City Council to allocate \$1 million to the Justice Fund to provide free, comprehensive immigration support to residents, regardless of their background. As City leaders, you have the power to create a Long Beach where families no longer live in constant fear, loss, or uncertainty.

Thank you,

Grecia Lopez-Reyes

Project Director

Long Beach Coalition for Good Jobs and a Healthy Community

