Impact Report:
Legal Services in the Office of New Americans

The Office of New Americans (ONA) oversees the implementation of State-funded legal services programs through grants to pro-bono legal services providers to help those who are income eligible awaiting immigration court proceedings. Individuals, including children, going through deportation proceedings are not guaranteed an attorney.

The programs are the Detention and Deportation Defense Initiative (DDDI), the Unaccompanied Minors and Youth Legal Services Program, and the recently launched Rapid Legal Response Initiative. Together, these programs play an important role in keeping families together, keeping children in school, ensuring access to due process, and increasing legal capacity, as immigration enforcement and detention continue to increase and the legal landscape becomes more challenging. Through these programs, ONA helps bridge the gap in access to legal representation by providing funding to providers who connect eligible residents with legal counsel and, when needed, critical social services.

This impact report highlights the outcomes and accomplishments of the legal services programs supported through ONA-administered State FY26 funding from July 2025 through June 2026. State-funded legal service providers are providing critical work supporting income-eligible New Jersey residents facing deportation proceedings.

For more information about ONA's legal services programs and other initiatives, visit Office of New Americans

The Detention and Deportation Defense Initiative (DDDI)



The Office of New Americans provided $8.2M in FY26 funding to community-based legal services agencies: Legal Services of New Jersey, American Friends Service Committee, Rutgers Law School, and Seton Hall Law School to provide free and expert legal counsel and representation to income-eligible New Jersey residents who are at risk of deportations or are facing deportation/removal proceedings and do not have access to legal counsel.

DDDI provides free legal and social services support for those facing detention and/or deportation who cannot afford representation—helping ensure access to legal counsel for low-income families.

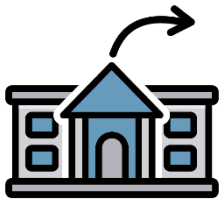
By providing access to legal counsel, DDDI helps individuals navigate complex immigration proceedings, pursue available legal protections, and challenge detention when appropriate. This representation can have consequences that extend beyond the courtroom—affecting family stability, access to medical care, and an individual's ability to remain in their community.

Impact of DDDI in FY2026:

2,400+ New Jerseyans Served

Secured Releases from Detention

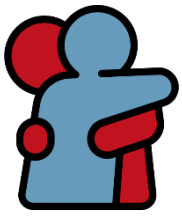
Providers successfully helped secure release of New Jersey residents from detention facilities in Delaney Hall, the Elizabeth Detention facility and around the country.



Facilitated Emotional Support and Social Services Resources

Legal service providers have connected their clients and family members to mental health, housing, and food assistance services to support them through deportation proceedings.

These connections recognize that the impact of detention and deportation extends beyond the individual facing proceedings and can affect the stability and well-being of entire families.



Pursued Immigration Protections

Secured U-Visas for victims of crimes who have suffered physical or mental abuse and who have been helpful to law enforcement in the investigation of a crime.

Legal representation can help eligible individuals understand and pursue available forms of immigration relief and protection.



Protected Family Stability

By helping individuals pursue available legal protections and connecting families with essential resources, DDDI supported greater stability for New Jersey residents navigating immigration proceedings.



Over 1,600 Legal Matters Filed

Legal matters include bond hearings, removal proceedings, appeals, motions to reopen, habeas petitions, and other immigration-related legal matters.

Sought Life Changing Immigration Protections

The legal matters have helped preserve or pursue immigration protections such as DACA, asylum, and other temporary or humanitarian statuses.



Protected Due Proccess

Representation allowed detainees to make informed decisions about their case and access their full rights under U.S. law. It improved access to a fair and efficient trial.



Enabled Access To Medical Care

In some cases, detainees with chronic illnesses, including cancer, diabetes, or HIV, were released and had the opportunity to receive necessary medical care.



Unaccompanied Minors and Youth Legal Services

No Child Should Have to Navigate Immigration Court Alone



As unaccompanied migrant children arrive in New Jersey seeking refuge, many are left without counsel as they face legal proceedings. The State-funded Unaccompanied Minors and Youth Legal Services program, administered by the ONA with FY26 funding of $5.35 million, helps bridge this gap by connecting eligible youth with free legal counsel and essential social services through its primary grantee Kids in Need of Defense (KIND) and a network of partner organizations, including the New Jersey Consortium, Make the Road States, Catholic Charities, Camden Center for Law and Social Justice, Inc., American Friends Service Committee Immigrant Rights Program, Morris County Organization for Hispanic Affairs, Inc., and the Young Center.

The program also helps identify and address children's social service needs, connecting them with essential resources that support their health, safety, and education.

Impact of Unaccompanied Minors and Youth Legal Services in FY26 Impact:

600+ Minors and Youth Served

Over 300 Hotline Screenings



Screenings helped identify children's legal needs, potential avenues for immigration relief, and social service needs, allowing providers to connect youth with appropriate legal assistance and resources that support their well-being.

Over 200 Approved Immigration Petitions



Legal service providers secured approvals for state-court petitions for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) and related immigration petitions, helping eligible youth advance through the process of pursuing immigration protections.

Over 200 Social Service Connections



Providers connected youth with essential resources, including basic needs assistance, medical and mental health services, education, recreation, and crisis intervention support.

Responding to a Changing Immigration Landscape and Expanding Access to Legal Representation

Under the Sherrill Administration, New Jersey is expanding its investment in immigration legal services to meet the growing need for representation. For FY27, a $12 million increase in funding will bring total funding for the DDDI to $20.2 million, increasing the funding for this program for the first time since 2022 and tripling the funding available for these services. This investment will expand the program's reach by increasing the number of participating legal service providers from four to ten, more than doubling the statewide network of organizations providing free legal representation to low-income New Jerseyans facing detention and deportation.

The Administration is also strengthening legal services capacity through ONA's Rapid Legal Response Initiative. This initiative is New Jersey's response to the ongoing changes in federal immigration courts and access to due progress. This program expands access to specialized legal expertise for complex cases, including habeas corpus petitions, and strengthens providers' abilities to respond to evolving immigration enforcement practices. In the first quarter of this new initiative, approximately 155 volunteer attorneys received training in federal litigation to support immigration attorneys representing individuals facing detention and deportation.

Together, these investments expand access to legal representation and strengthen New Jersey's capacity to respond to increasingly complex immigration cases. By increasing the number of participating providers and expanding access to specialized legal expertise, New Jersey is reinforcing its commitment to helping eligible residents navigate immigration proceedings, supporting family stability, and protecting due process.