



Neighbors Link strongly supports budgets and policies that respect the dignity of each human and recognize the contributions made by immigrants. The following pages discuss key legislative and budget issues we are working for in 2024.

Access to Representation Act

Unlike in the criminal legal system, immigrants do not have a right to a government-paid attorney in immigration court. As a result, immigrants who cannot afford a lawyer or find a nonprofit organization to help must represent themselves in immigration proceedings. These proceedings are often complicated and difficult, even for the most well-educated layperson and this is compounded for people who may have limited English language. The consequences of losing a case are devastating, including detention in dangerous facilities, permanent family separation and people being returned to unsafe situations. As of September 2023, nearly 145,000 people in New York were fighting their cases in immigration court without a lawyer.

Representation alone can significantly increase the chances of winning a case. Studies have shown that immigrants with representation are up to 10 times more likely to obtain relief from deportation than those without, and that detained immigrants with representation are 3.5 times more likely to be granted bond, enabling their release from detention.

Advocacy Item

- Pass the Access to Representation Act (S999A/A170A) to ensure the right to counsel for all immigrants facing deportation in New York. This Act would mandate that New York State appoint a lawyer for anyone who cannot afford one and who is at risk of deportation.





Spotlight on Neighbors Link Community Law Practice

Neighbors Link Community Law Practice represents a wide array of immigrant New Yorkers on matters ranging from deportation defense to naturalization. In 2023, we served nearly 3,000 unique clients in complex legal cases, limited scope cases and consultations. Recently, we have focused our efforts to assist new arrivals in completing applications for Temporary Protected Status and asylum. We know the transformative power of immigration law to protect the vulnerable, keep families together and transform lives, but this can only happen if individuals facing the immigration system have access to representation. **Passing the Access to Representation Act and increasing state funding for a wide array of immigration legal services are two of the most important steps we can take to ensure justice for immigrant New Yorkers.**



Immigration Legal Services Funding



New York State has been a national leader in supporting immigration legal services. Over the past year, many new arrivals have come to New York and these individuals need legal services to navigate the immigration system, apply for asylum, Temporary Protected Status, obtain work authorization and build new lives. Investing in these services is a win-win, allowing families more opportunities to support themselves and increasing the labor force and tax base in the state.

Advocacy Item

- Invest in \$150 million in immigration services, including \$62 million for deportation defense, \$65 million to recruit and train legal teams and \$23 million to fund and connect immigrants with comprehensive support programs.



NYS Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP)

There is a critical lack of affordable, stable, long-term housing in New York. Currently, there are more than 90,000 New Yorkers without a home and more than 150,000 households at risk of eviction. Housing vouchers are an important tool to combat homelessness, but many New Yorkers are currently not eligible for local or federal rental assistance programs due to their immigration status, lack of income or prior felony convictions.

The HAVP will combat the homelessness crisis and yield significant savings to the state in getting people out of shelters and reducing indirect costs, such as increased health care costs and social services. Vouchers provide stability, which in turn enables people to find work and get settled. The return on investment is significant and could result in millions of dollars in savings for New York State in the long run.

Advocacy Item

- Include \$250 million in the budget for the NYS Housing Access Voucher Program (S568B/A4021A) to create a flexible, statewide Section 8-like voucher to be used by people at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

New York For All

Our entire community is safer when all residents, regardless of immigration status, feel safe driving to work, taking their kids to school and reporting crimes to law enforcement. Unfortunately, many members of the immigrant community often feel unsafe interacting with state and local government agencies for fear that this will lead to a devastating interaction with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

The Westchester County Immigration Protection Act was an important local step in building trust between local residents and law enforcement by defining what information county law enforcement can share with federal officials. It is now critical that we bring this legislation to the state level.

Advocacy Item

- Pass the New York for All Act (S987/A5686) to broadly prohibit state and local officers from enforcing federal immigration laws, funneling people into ICE custody, and sharing sensitive information with federal immigration authorities. The Act also prohibits ICE and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) from entering non-public areas of state and local property without a judicial warrant. It also ensures that people in custody are given notice of their rights before being interviewed by ICE, and begins the process of limiting ICE and CBP access to state information databases.





NY Working Families Tax Credit

The high cost of living is currently a struggle for many families in New York. The costs of housing, groceries, child care and other basic living needs are simply too high for many families. By making some changes to our tax code, we can give economically burdened workers and families cash to pay for what they need. This tax credit would improve the lives of nearly every New York family with children, regardless of their immigration status.

Advocacy Item

- Pass the Working Families Tax Credit (S277B/A4022B) to make our tax code better for all families, regardless of immigration status. This is an expanded, refundable tax credit that combines the Empire State Child Credit (ESCC), the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and the dependent exemption (DE) into one bigger, more effective credit.

Language Access

Many immigrant New Yorkers are unable to access critical state services due to language barriers. Under current law, state agencies must provide for the translation of vital documents in the 12 most commonly spoken non-English languages and provide interpretation services in any language with respect to the provision of agency services or benefits. Despite this, interpretation and translation services remain inconsistent at the county level, particularly at the Department of Motor Vehicles and Department of Education.

Advocacy Items

- Pass the Language Access Expansion Act (S3381A- A7235) to expand access to language services to regional areas by directing county agencies to provide interpretation and translation services, including local languages to the statewide language list, and requiring county agencies such as the Department of Motor Vehicles and Department of Education to provide in-person interpretation.
- Commit \$10 million to expand language access and build New York's diverse and multilingual workforce by creating a learning language justice cooperative.





Unemployment Bridge Program



Unemployment insurance is an essential labor right. However, hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers are currently not eligible for unemployment insurance because of their immigration status or the kind of work that they do. This includes undocumented workers, those who are part of the cash economy (including many domestic workers and day laborers), formerly incarcerated workers and many self-employed workers in low-income industries. When these workers lose jobs or income, they have nowhere to turn to support themselves or their families. A permanent fix is needed to ensure that all workers have access to a basic safety net.

Advocacy Item

- Pass the Unemployment Bridge Program (S3192/A4821) to provide for thousands of freelancers, self-employed workers, formerly incarcerated workers and those who are not eligible for unemployment insurance because of their immigration status. This program will give workers access to the support they need to provide for themselves and their families, especially when they face sudden job loss.

DALE (Desde Abajo Labor Enforcement) Campaign

The DALE (Desde Abajo Labor Enforcement) Campaign seeks to protect undocumented workers who speak out about abuse or unsafe working conditions. In January 2023, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced that noncitizen workers who are victims of, or witnesses to, a violation of labor rights, can now access a streamlined and expedited deferred action request process. Deferred action protects noncitizen workers from threats of immigration-related retaliation from exploitative employers. Unfortunately, the Biden Administration has not promoted this policy and many immigrant workers are unaware that the policy even exists. In addition, some workers who have received protection are at risk of losing it without renewals from DHS.

Advocacy Items

- We need President Biden and the Secretaries of Labor and Homeland Security to defend and amplify this policy publicly and to support workplace protections for all workers, regardless of immigration status.
- DHS is considering a renewal policy for DALE protections. Until that happens, all workers with these protections need to receive renewals. A straightforward and streamlined renewal process is needed.

