



FEBRUARY 2026

LEGISLATIVE NEWSLETTER

During this time when the basic human rights of immigrants are under threat, Neighbors Link has stepped up our work. We are providing expanded legal assistance, community education, access to community resources, and advocacy. We are prepared to meet this moment with our mission to serve and uplift those who call this community home. We hope you will join us in this work. Please see below for various ways to get involved.

Advocating for legislation to protect the rights of immigrants is one of the key ways people can get involved right now. The following pages discuss key legislative and budget issues we are working towards in New York in 2026.





CARE for Immigrant Families

The demand for immigration legal services in New York State is skyrocketing due to new aggressive federal enforcement tactics, an exponential increase in detentions without bond, expedited removals and deportations, and a rapid surge in federal resources devoted to immigration. Between January and July 2025, ICE arrested nearly 5,000 New Yorkers, more than in all of 2024 combined. The CARE for Immigrant Families coalition is fighting to ensure that immigrant New Yorkers can access sustainable and comprehensive legal help so they can stay with their families, work, go to school, and remain in their communities.



Immigration Legal Services Funding

New York State has long been a national leader in supporting immigration legal services. However, increased funding is needed to meet the skyrocketing volume of cases due to changes in federal practices. As of August 2025, nearly 340,000 cases were pending before New York State immigration courts, and the number of detained immigrants has nearly doubled in the past year.

New York has the opportunity to rise to this moment and once again show leadership in ensuring that immigrants can access sustainable and comprehensive legal help. Immigration legal services allow people to stay with their families, work, go to school, and remain in their communities.

Advocacy Item:

Invest \$175 million in immigration services and infrastructure:

- \$85 million to sustain existing legal and social services programs, fund recruitment and retention initiatives, and ensure equitable compensation.
- \$50 million for new emergency deportation defense and social services.
- \$40 million for capacity-building and infrastructure investments to expand the pipeline of immigration legal professionals entering the field and strengthen provider infrastructure to support scaling up services.



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 deported to unsafe situations.

Access to representation is critical to protect the rights of immigrants and safeguard the rule of law. The integrity of the judicial process and system is undermined when immigrants can be detained and deported without counsel.



Advocacy Item

- Pass the Access to Representation Act (A270/S141) to establish a right to counsel in immigration court under a universal representation model, ensuring that anyone facing deportation who cannot afford a lawyer will be provided one.

Building Up Immigrant Legal Defense (BUILD) Act

New York needs to ensure stability in our immigration legal services so that immigrant New Yorkers can keep their families together and continue working and contributing to their communities.

Advocacy Item

Pass the BUILD Act (A2689/S4538) to invest in four years of funding to grow and strengthen legal services through:

- Workforce development and training.
- Expansion of legal representation to underserved communities and rural regions.
- Integration of social workers and community-based organizations to coordinate client support and free up attorney time.
- Investment in physical, administrative, and technological infrastructure.



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 immigrant New Yorkers 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).

Westchester County and other localities have adopted laws or policies that bar cooperation with federal immigration enforcement, except when required by law or a judicial warrant. Unfortunately, other counties in the state have entered into 287G agreements with immigration authorities, deputizing local law enforcement to act as federal immigration agents and thereby dramatically increasing the reach of federal enforcement.

When local agencies and law enforcement conspire with ICE, New Yorkers lose trust in the police and government agencies. People choose not to interact with any public institutions for fear it will lead to family separation, detention, or deportation. New York must act to ensure that all residents feel safe interacting with public officials without the fear of separation from their family.

Advocacy Item

- Pass the New York for All Act (S2235/A3506) to broadly prohibit state and local officers from enforcing federal immigration laws, funneling people into ICE custody, and sharing sensitive information with federal immigration agents except when required by law or a judicial warrant. New York for All would also ensure that people in custody are informed of their rights before being interviewed by ICE. Finally, it would prohibit ICE and CBP from entering non-public areas of state and local property without a judicial warrant and begin the process of limiting their access to state information databases.





Living Wage for All NY

Families throughout New York are juggling rising costs, unstable jobs, and constant uncertainty. Wages that do not meet basic needs only push them closer to crisis. We need to support a Living Wage for All and an end to subminimum wages so working families can finally have stability, not just survive month to month. This issue is particularly critical for immigrant families, who often work in industries with subminimum wages.

Advocacy Item

- Support the Living Wage for All NY campaign, an ambitious, inclusive, and long-overdue effort to raise the wage floor for every worker in New York State. This legislative and policy agenda includes calls to:
 - Raise the minimum wage to a true living wage—one that is at or above the actual cost of living in New York.
 - Tie future wage increases to cost-of-living metrics to ensure wages don't fall behind again.
 - Eliminate all subminimum wages so that all workers are included. This includes ending the subminimum wage for tipped workers as proposed in the One Fair Wage legislation, but also for incarcerated workers, workers with disabilities and youth.

Next Steps

If you want to support our advocacy priorities, please contact Governor Kathy Hochul, State Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, State Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, and your local New York State elected representatives to let them know what priorities you want to see in the budget and what legislation you want passed. Contact information is below. If you have any questions, please contact Katie Graves-Abe at kgraves-abe@neighborslink.org.

CONTACT INFO:

- Governor Kathy Hochul, 518-474-8390 or <https://www.governor.ny.gov/content/governor-contact-form>
- State Senate Majority Leader - Andrea Stewart-Cousins: 518-455-2585 or 914-423-4031, scousins@nysenate.gov
- State Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie: 518-455-3791 or 718-654-6539, speaker@nyassembly.gov
- Information for your local representatives- Check here: [State Senate](#) or [Assembly](#)