

## Message from the **Executive Director**



Dear Friends,

Immigration has always been a complex issue, and this year, we saw those intricacies and nuances take center stage in the national discourse. As our issue came to the forefront of a contentious, divisive election season, the American Immigration Council displayed consistency and clarity: dispelling misinformation with facts in real time, nimbly responding to changing conditions, and scenario planning to enable us to meet a wide universe of potential opportunities and challenges coming out of a deeply uncertain political climate.

As we look ahead to 2025, our challenge and our charge is to protect immigrant communities from harmful policy proposals and dangerous, xenophobic rhetoric. However, we know that the policy proposals of the incoming administration and the deeply polarized narrative around immigration don't just impact immigrant communities; they have a profound impact on our economy, particularly sectors that rely heavily on immigrant labor; the movement for racial justice; and the health of our democracy. There is a long and arduous road ahead to fight for policy solutions and a different way of talking about immigrants, and our work this year has been critical to shaping the landscape of the next administration and ensuring that the Council is ready to meet the moment.

We know that we cannot do this work alone. Immigration advocates must work together and bring more voices into our coalition. Throughout our scenario planning this year, we prioritized bringing partners from within and outside of the immigration movement together to compile knowledge, brainstorm strategies, and coordinate responses. We have also built our capacity to organize on-the-ground non-traditional allies, like businesses and chambers of commerce, as messengers of the economic, social, and civic contributions immigrants bring to their communities to promote more civic integration and acceptance. At the same time, we are working closely with other leaders in narrative change to share learnings and advance a collective sense of belonging across the country.

Our efforts in 2024 mean that the Council now stands ready to fight the imminent threats to immigrants' rights and continue our critical work to shape a more welcoming country. We are prepared to be nimble in our emergency response and deeply committed to our long-term work to change the landscape in which we operate. We are grateful to our community of donors, champions, and partners, who are standing by us in solidarity as we take on the work ahead.

Warmly,

Jeremy Robbins

## 2024 Highlights

#### Calculating the Costs of Mass Deportation

We produced deep analysis showing that a long-term mass deportation operation would cost \$967.9 billion over 10 years and be detrimental to the U.S. economy, removing 4% of the workforce, reducing the GDP by more than 4%, and costing billions in lost tax revenue. In the weeks following its release, this report was cited and featured by many leading news outlets and broadcasts, including the New York Times and 60 Minutes. It has been downloaded from our website 136,614 times, further demonstrating the timely, high-quality analysis it offered of a salient policy proposal. Read more on page 10.

#### Breaking Down Complex New Policy Developments

As major actions and proposals have been put forward, the Council has acted swiftly to publish detailed analyses, reinforcing our reputation as a leading source for journalists and the public to understand changes in immigration policy. In February, the Council seized on one of the most pivotal moments in recent congressional action on immigration and produced a rapid analysis of the mammoth Senate border bill. In June, when President Biden announced an executive action aiming to dramatically reduce asylum processing, we did the same, publishing a rapid analysis within 24 hours that was prominently featured on national media. Read more on page 9.



#### Stopping Unconstitutional Anti-Immigrant Laws in Florida and Iowa

After the Council and partners brought suit, federal courts blocked the implementation of two state laws that would target people based on immigration status. A federal judge blocked a section of a Florida law that criminalizes the transportation of individuals into Florida who may have entered the country without federal inspection — an unclear, sweeping law that violated the rights of immigrants and U.S. citizens alike. A federal court also blocked lowa's criminal reentry and removal law that would give state officials broad power to arrest, detain, and deport noncitizens who reentered the U.S. after a previous removal or exclusion. These rulings are a warning that states cannot enact laws that usurp federal immigration enforcement authority. *Read more on page 11.* 

Photo: The American Immigration Council, Iowa Migrant Movement for Justice, the ACLU of Iowa, and the ACLU Immigrants' Rights Project outside the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Iowa after their oral argument before the court on their motion for a preliminary injunction.



#### Defending the Right to Seek Asylum

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has prevented many people from accessing asylum in a safe and orderly manner by blocking them from lawfully presenting at ports of entry. This year, the Council achieved major wins in our two lawsuits challenging these unlawful and harmful policies. In September, we successfully defeated the government's motion to dismiss our case challenging the federal government's border-wide policy of turning back asylum seekers without an appointment at ports of entry along the southern border, thereby denying them access to the U.S. asylum process. One month later, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals largely affirmed a lower court decision in favor of the plaintiffs in our case challenging the government's systematic turnbacks — or "metering" — of people seeking asylum at ports of entry along the U.S.-Mexico border. *Read more on page 12*.

## Exposing Racial Disparities and Dangerous Conditions in Detention

Based on our previous Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, we released a new report that analyzed dangerous conditions and racial disparities at the Torrance Detention Facility in New Mexico. This publicly available information is now helping to mount pressure to close the facility. *Read more on page 14*.

## Providing Free Counsel to the Most Vulnerable Asylum Seekers

We restructured our Immigration Justice Campaign (IJC) to be more responsive to the needs of asylum seekers in a rapidly shifting policy environment, building out new, more flexible models for training and mentorship to acknowledge the wide variety of needs and largely remote nature of our program. As we did so, we continued to connect the most vulnerable immigrants to high-quality counsel. For example, our legal information hotline for migrants in detention has answered almost 300 calls to help people prepare for their expedited credible fear interviews in a setting where they have no other access to counsel. Read more on page 16.

#### Standing Up for the Civil Rights of LGBTQ+ Immigrants

We have initiated a broad vision to advocate for LGBTQ+ rights for asylum seekers. This year, we submitted a joint civil rights complaint, ran a comment campaign that drove over 1000 messages to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and launched a new IJC initiative to provide attorney resources and dedicated legal support for LGBTQ+ asylum seekers. *Read more on page 15*.

#### Emphasizing the Contributions of Immigrants in the United States

We continue to release original research and resources that highlight the importance of immigrants in the fabric of the United States, including our naturalization fact sheet, H-2A and H-2B interactive reports, new state-level data on Map the Impact, New American Fortune 500 companies, and localized reports for communities in places like the Texas border region and the Great Lakes region. Read more on page 18.

#### Fighting Discriminatory State Policies

In collaboration with partners, we created a toolkit for mobilizing against anti-immigrant policies to equip advocates with information, tools, and strategies to challenge unjust and harmful immigration policies in their communities. We also tracked more than 800 immigrant-related state bills — both supportive and discriminatory — and kept our partners and stakeholders abreast of their status. *Read more on page 23*.

#### **Expanding Access to Work Permits**

In December, the Department of Homeland Security announced a new regulation expanding automatic renewals for work authorization, making it easier for asylum seekers and other immigrants to contribute economically and support their families. The Council and the Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project led a coalition of advocates for this change, including rallying over 100 business leaders to join an October sign-on letter urging President Biden to take action to address work permit backlogs. Under the new rule, automatic renewals are available for up to 18 months from six months under the previous rule. *Read more on page 24*.

#### **Expanding Our State Network**

We grew our bipartisan Office of New Americans (ONA) State Network to 22 states, with the addition of Pennsylvania, Hawaii, and New Mexico this year. Our rapidly growing network has more than tripled in size since 2019. *Read more on page 24*.

#### Bringing Talent to U.S. Companies

Through webinars and educational sessions, we are spreading the word about the Council's recent designation in the J-1 Visa Research Scholar category. This designation will complement our two decades of experience in sponsoring around 500 interns and trainees annually through our Cultural Exchange Program. *Read more on page 29*.

Inside this report, you will read in depth about how our staff has worked tirelessly toward progress on advancing a fairer, more humane immigration system, informing decisionmakers and the



#### 2024 by the Numbers



22,000+

Immigration Justice Campaign volunteers and advocates



295

Calls answered from detainees seeking legal assistance inside CBP custody



1000+

Grassroots messages sent standing up for LGBTQ+ rights in detention



1,142

Grassroots comments to proposed asylum policy changes



\$967.9B

Estimated economic cost of mass deportation



<24-48 hr

Our rapid analyses of complex proposed immigration policies published



7.4M+

Number of immigrants eligible for naturalization identified by our research



+008

State legislative bills tracked and reported to partners and stakeholders



**22** 

States participating in our Office of New Americans State Network



4,977

Number of media mentions of the Council's staff and resources



94

Immigration Impact blog posts published



\$93.0M+

Belonging Begins with Us donated media since 2020

# Programmatic Updates

Advancing a Fairer,
More Humane Immigration System:

Policy, Litigation, Transparency, and the Immigration Justice Campaign

## **Policy**

We advocate for a modern and just immigration system by educating policymakers and the public on immigration issues with subject matter expertise, fact-based tools, and a nuanced understanding of the issues.

## Increased Visibility on Capitol Hill

The Council's targeted engagement with members of Congress has increased our visibility on the Hill and deepened our connections with legislators and their staff. Repeated testimony before members of Congress has built our reputation as a trusted source of information on immigration issues, elevating the Council's effectiveness in Congress. On March 7, 2024, we testified before the U.S. House Judiciary's Subcommittee on Immigration Integrity, Security, and Enforcement, calling attention to the overdue need for Congress to overhaul the asylum system. The testimony called for more resources to address the challenges the asylum system faces and has impacted the ongoing immigration debate. After a clip of our compelling testimony went viral on X, formerly Twitter, Ranking Member Pramila Jayapal invited us to brief members in person to help educate them on the history of the border. The Council has since participated in direct, one-on-one meetings to better inform members of Congress about our immigration system and options for reform. Additionally, we are working with other members of Congress in their efforts to revive bipartisan immigration talks. To continue this critical work, the Council has prepared to connect with new members of the 119th Congress and provide foundational information about the immigration system and its challenges.

#### Rapid Analyses of Complex New Immigration Proposals and Policies

The introduction of the Senate bipartisan border legislation in February was one of the most pivotal moments in congressional action on immigration in the last few years. Our team produced a <u>rapid analysis</u> within 48 hours of the bill's introduction despite its mammoth size. It examined the changes that the passage of the bill would implement and offered our analysis of the pros and cons of the bill.

In June, when President Biden announced major new action intended to restrict asylum at the border, our team once again sprang into action and published a comprehensive analysis less than 24 hours later. This analysis was prominently featured on MSNBC that night in coverage of President Biden's action. Producing timely, informative, and influential reports on these consequential actions has helped build on the Council's reputation as a trustworthy organization with the expertise to explain what is happening and what is needed to make progress on achievable immigration reforms. We have also followed these reports with rapid-response webinars available to the public, which have garnered thousands of attendees.



SPOTLIGHT

## **The Costs of Mass Deportation**

ith mass deportation becoming an ever-more prominent proposal among some politicians and leading immigration hawks, the Council's policy and research teams released a comprehensive analysis of the costs and complications such policies would incur. We sought to answer the most pressing questions surrounding these proposals: How could the U.S. possibly carry out the largest law enforcement and removal operation in world history, targeting roughly 13.3 million people who lack permanent legal status? And at what cost to the United States?

A mass deportation operation aiming to arrest, detain, process, and deport one million people per year would cost at least \$88 billion annually and \$967.9 billion over more than a decade.

#### **Detaining One Million People Annually**

The U.S. would need to build and maintain 24 times more ICE detention capacity than what currently exists. The government would also need to establish and maintain over 1,000 new immigration courtrooms to process people at such a rate.

#### **Economic Impact**

Removing this number of undocumented immigrants from the labor force would reduce the U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) by 4.2% to 6.8% and result in a significant reduction in tax revenues for currently paid by undocumented immigrant households, including \$46.8 billion in federal taxes, \$29.3 billion in state and local taxes, \$22.6 billion to Social Security, and \$5.7 billion to Medicare.

#### **Devastated Labor Markets**

Mass deportations of 4% of the U.S. workforce would cause significant labor shocks across multiple key industries, with especially acute impacts on construction, agriculture, and the hospitality sector. We estimate that nearly 14%

of people employed in the construction industry are undocumented and removing that labor would disrupt all forms of construction across the nation, from homes to businesses to basic infrastructure.

#### **Human Toll**

Separating family members would lead to tremendous emotional stress and could cause economic hardship for the 5.1 million U.S. citizen children who live with an undocumented family member.

## A single year of a million-deportation regime, with its \$88 billion price tag, would cost:

- Nearly twice the annual budget of the National Institutes of Health.
- Nearly four times the budget of NASA.
- Nearly three times as much as the federal government spends on child nutrition.
- More than the government gives out in the Child Tax Credit program.
- Eighteen times more than the entire world spends each year on cancer research.

In the weeks following its release, this report was cited by journalists and columnists at leading national publications like *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, CNN, CBS News, and *USA Today*; in regional publications like *The Boston Globe*, *Texas Observer*, and *The Seattle Times*; and featured on television in news segments with Council experts and infotainment shows like *60 Minutes* and *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*. The mass deportation report has been viewed over 136,000 times, demonstrating the high-quality analysis it offered of a highly salient policy proposal.

## Litigation

We use the courts to demand a fair process for immigrants by challenging unjust policies and laws.

## Scenario-Planning with Immigrants' Rights Organizations

Understanding that the 2024 election held immense significance for immigration, we convened litigators and organizers for a series of meetings to plan responses to potential negative policy shifts post-election. To prepare, we needed to gather advocates who would be best positioned to challenge those policies, both in and out of court, and create a blueprint for our collective response. These planning sessions brought together legal and direct service advocates from across the field to coordinate response and help us fight for immigrants' rights with a united voice and greater impact.

#### Successfully Challenging Unconstitutional State Laws

The Council is actively countering a growing trend as states like Iowa and Florida attempt to enact their own immigration enforcement and removal processes outside of federal law; many of these bills are inspired by Texas's 2023 Senate Bill 4. If left unchallenged, these laws would create a patchwork immigration system, with different rules governing who can enter and who can be removed from the United States.

#### Florida

In May, a federal judge blocked a central provision of Florida's harsh, sweeping anti-immigration law after the Council <u>brought suit</u> alongside the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), ACLU of Florida, Americans for Immigrant

Justice, and the Southern Poverty Law Center. The suit which was filed on behalf of several individuals and the Farmworker Association of Florida challenged Section 10 of the Senate Bill 1718, which made it a crime to drive an immigrant who entered the U.S. without inspection into Florida.

This ruling means increased safety for people living in, working in, and traveling to Florida; under Section 10, families would have been unable to visit each other across state lines. Immigrants living near the state border may have been unable to drive their children to medical appointments, soccer matches, or church events. The Council is proud that our suit protected those at risk. As states pass unjust and unconstitutional laws that target people for their immigration status or that of their family members, it's critical that our courts affirm that immigration enforcement falls under the purview of the federal government and that states cannot enact their own immigration enforcement laws.

#### Iowa

In June, a federal court blocked Iowa's unprecedented criminal reentry and removal law, Senate File 2340. This was done after the Council presented an oral argument in our lawsuit filed with co-counsel ACLU and ACLU of Iowa, on behalf of Iowa Migrant Movement for Justice (Iowa MMJ), a membership-based immigration legal services and advocacy organization, and two Iowa residents. S.F. 2340 attempts to set up an independent, punitive state immigration scheme, giving Iowa state officials broad power to arrest, detain, and deport noncitizens in the state who reentered the United States after a previous removal or exclusion. The law would even apply to noncitizens who reenter with federal permission or who subsequently obtain lawful federal immigration status.



The American Immigration Council litigation team at this year's litigation convening.

We continue to litigate this case in the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals, which is essential to discourage future copycat laws. Through this litigation, we have shown Iowa and other states considering enacting similar laws that they will face strong opposition and will need to overcome serious litigation challenges if they attempt to usurp federal immigration enforcement authority in order to target their own residents.

## Upholding the Rights of Asylum Seekers

For years, and across presidential administrations, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has sought to prevent people from accessing asylum in a safe and orderly manner by blocking them from lawfully presenting at ports of entry. Through two impactful lawsuits, the Council is challenging several of these unlawful and harmful policies.

In October, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals largely affirmed a lower court decision in favor of the plaintiffs in our case challenging the government's systematic turnbacks — or "metering"— of people seeking asylum at ports of entry along the U.S.-Mexico border. Since at least 2016, the government has prevented individuals who want to lawfully present at ports of entry from accessing the U.S. asylum process through metering, as well as intimidation, coercion,

physical abuse, and other improper tactics. Vulnerable families, children, and adults have been pushed back and left stranded in precarious conditions in Mexico, where migrants routinely fall prey to violence and exploitation. After years of litigation, the circuit held that the government's action violated the law and upheld most of the district court's injunction providing relief to a class of asylum seekers negatively impacted by metering and a 2019 asylum ban.

In September, we successfully defeated the government's motion to dismiss in a <u>related case</u> challenging the federal government's border-wide policy and practice of turning back asylum seekers without a CBP One appointment at ports of entry along the southern border, thereby denying them access to the U.S. asylum process since 2023. The plaintiffs in the case are immigrant rights organizations Al Otro Lado and the Haitian Bridge Alliance, and 10 individuals who were turned away at the southern border by CBP and denied their fundamental right under U.S. and international law to seek asylum in the United States.

Both suits, which we filed with our partners at the Center for Gender and Refugee Studies, the Center for Constitutional Rights, Mayer Brown, and Vinson & Elkins seek to end CBP's unlawful use of metering and to ensure that the government is complying with U.S. laws meant to protect asylum seekers' rights and safety.

## **Transparency**

Through our Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) filings, we play a leading role in shedding light on immigration policies and information that is otherwise shielded from the public eye.

## Elevating Transparency Efforts Globally

In September, alongside our partners at the Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI), we presented our 2023 report on CBP's deployment during racial justice protests after the murder of George Floyd at the Sixth World Conference on Remedies to Racial and Social Inequality. Our analysis of FOIA-obtained records found that CBP deployed heavily militarized units that received limited training in protecting protesters' rights to predominantly peaceful demonstrations. The opportunity to present this project to a global audience and contextualize the Council's work and immigration policy more generally within the greater ecosystem of the fight against inequality was transformative. The Cape Town, South Africa gathering brought together researchers,

academics, and community advocates to discuss different aspects of inequality worldwide and theories and practices on how to fix them. Our presentation focused on how organizations can use government transparency to hold governments accountable for rights violations and allowed us to strengthen relationships with organizations and scholars at the forefront of addressing racial inequities in the United States and abroad.

We also raised the profile of immigration-related transparency work nationally through our annual interdisciplinary gathering of thought leaders, hosted in mid-May in partnership with American Oversight and MuckRock. More than 70 attendees from organizations across the country attended the virtual convening, which featured a keynote chat with Nate Jones, The Washington Post's FOIA director. Participants heard from panelists on pressing topics such as border policies, using FOIA and transparency tactics to effect policy changes, and how transparency organizations can prepare for 2025. Practical issues like drafting better records requests, working with media, and developing stronger partnerships with organizations whose mission may not be transparency-focused were also featured.



The American Immigration Council and BAJI presenting at the World Conference on Remedies to Racial and Social Inequality in Cape Town.

## Seeking City-Level Data on Refugee Resettlements

After the U.S. Department of State failed to respond to our April FOIA requesting city-level data on refugee settlements, the Council filed a lawsuit in July to compel the agency to release the data. Up until 2020, researchers could utilize city-level data on refugee resettlements to assess how these populations impacted cities across the country. The Council's research team used this data to highlight the contribution of refugees to local economies in our Map the Impact tool and reports that show refugees help revitalize local communities and economies and reduce local crime rates. However, the State Department stopped publishing city-level data and began publishing data only at the state level. This lack of specificity makes it difficult for researchers to capture the contributions of refugees to local communities and impedes our development of the Map the Impact tool. Taking a multi-disciplinary approach by seeking government transparency in tandem with our research department, the Council is working at all levels to highlight the contributions of immigrants to local communities and economies.

## Analyzing Racial Disparities and Dangerous Conditions in Detention

In October, we released our report capturing data from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) related to the race and ethnicity of people detained at the Torrance Detention Facility in New Mexico, which has been under scrutiny for its conditions. The analysis covers the period when DHS ramped up enforcement and detention of Haitian nationals after an encampment of migrants formed in Del Rio, Texas. Our transparency and research experts developed graphics demonstrating how ICE ignored warning signs of the dangerous conditions at Torrance and likely variances in the length of detention of migrants of color. The report is one of the only reports publicly available analyzing the race/ethnicity variables in a database maintained by ICE's Law Enforcement Systems and Analysis Division, and the disparities we discerned from the data are yet another sign that the Torrance Detention Facility is not an adequate place to detain people. While the Torrance County Commissioners extended the contract with ICE through the end of 2024, the pressure to close the facility is mounting

from advocates using firsthand accounts of detainees and reports like ours to expose dangerous and unjust conditions.

### Uncovering Unjust Border Patrol Practices

In March, along with Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, we published *Ohio*, *We Have a Problem*, a report that analyzes data and documents about detention practices carried out by U.S. Border Patrol agents from the Sandusky Bay station in northern Ohio. The data obtained from FOIA requests suggests that Border Patrol agents, in collusion with local law enforcement, engage in racial profiling and other problematic apprehension practices. A systematic sample of arrest reports shows that half of the arrests targeted Latin American men with darker skin colors between the ages of 23 and 40, and nearly 68% of arrests were Latin American men with darker skin colors between the ages of 18 and 55. The report exposed the problematic entanglement between federal immigration agencies and local law enforcement, including unjust tactics and rights violations used to detain and remove individuals. If not exposed, these tactics would go unchecked due to the high standards required by courts to hold law enforcement accountable when they violate immigrants' rights. Through the report, the Council calls for greater transparency and oversight, including ways victims of racial profiling can report complaints.

## Lawsuit Filed to Compel Records on the FERM Program

The Council filed a lawsuit to compel immigration agencies to disclose information about the implementation of the Family Expedited Removal Management (FERM) program launched in May 2023. The FERM program is an alternative to detention that allows ICE officers to place the head of households of certain asylum-seeking families detained near the U.S.-Mexico border under surveillance. Families enrolled in the FERM program must attend credible fear interviews, which screen individuals for asylum eligibility by assessing whether they have a "credible fear" of returning to their country of origin. Advocates working with enrolled families have reported that the process moves quickly, making it difficult for families to obtain legal representation; without representation, families are more likely to be removed without an opportunity for an immigration judge to assess their claims for protection.

## Immigration Justice Campaign

We organize a nationwide network of volunteers and advocates to fight for due process and justice for immigrants.

## Standing Up for the Civil Rights of LGBTQ+ Immigrants

In April, along with our longtime partners Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network, we filed a joint civil rights complaint on behalf of a group of transgender and nonbinary individuals who were detained at the Denver Contract Detention Facility in Aurora, Colorado and had experienced discrimination, harassment, and mistreatment while under ICE custody. In response, DHS' Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties opened nine separate investigations related to disability, denial of medical care, sexual abuse and harassment, and an extensive investigation looking at the use of force, condition of detention, transgender care, and discrimination. They also conducted an onsite visit to interview people detained there.

The complaint was the first step of our broader effort to provide more dedicated legal support to LGBTQ+ asylum seekers in the United States. Asylum officers and immigration judges often have misconceptions about LGBTQ+ identities and experiences that can lead to applications being wrongly denied. Representation from an attorney who has been trained on the specific issues that often arise in asylum cases for LGBTQ+ people can help ensure that an individual's LGBTQ+ identity — which is often the grounds for seeking asylum in the first place

— does not become a barrier instead. To meet the need for expert legal representation in cases like these, this summer we started a new IJC program in collaboration with partner organizations Asylum Pride House, LGBT Asylum Task Force, and Home Is Here NOLA to provide legal representation for LGBTQ+ asylum seekers in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Worcester, Massachusetts; and New Orleans, Louisiana. Attorneys who volunteer for this program receive focused training in the specific issues that can come up in asylum cases for LGBTQ+ people and awareness training so they can proficiently collaborate with their clients with sensitivity and consideration.

#### **Restructuring to Meet the Moment**

As we planned for the 2024 election and recognized that a new administration could rapidly shift immigration policy and enforcement, the Council recognized a need to restructure IJC to be nimbler and more responsive to changing needs for representation. In late 2023, we strategically paused new referrals to rebuild our team. While we were not taking new cases during this period, our work continued as we mentored volunteers on ongoing cases and stood up new programming to respond to urgent needs. In July, we were excited to launch our enhanced IJC and use our new and more flexible model to better meet the needs on the ground. Since then, we have placed 36 cases referred to us by our local partners with members of our pro bono network. Overall, our representation yields a 71% success rate in defensive merits hearings and 100% in affirmative merits decisions, far surpassing national averages.

#### **Supporting People in Detention**

To meet more legal service needs for migrants in detention, IJC began a project in October 2023 to provide credible fear interview preparation by phone for asylum seekers held in CBP custody — a setting that is inaccessible to members of the public, including attorneys. Usually, credible fear interviews have been conducted after a person has been released from CBP custody, but in 2023, the administration began a process called "Enhanced Expedited Removal," where many people are given their initial credible fear screenings while still in detention facilities on incredibly rapid timelines. This policy posed new challenges, as individuals detained by CBP were not eligible for alternatives to detention and had extremely limited access to counsel. As a result, passage rates for credible fear interviews held in CBP custody are far below the national average for similar interviews, demonstrating a critical need for access to counsel before asylum seekers completed their interviews.

Our legal information hotline provides a glimpse into CBP custody proceedings that are off-limits to outside observers. The Council was one of only two organizations to provide hotline coverage across all facilities in 2024. In 2024, our 44person volunteer team has spoken to 295 people in detention and their family members. Volunteers provide basic information about the credible fear interview process and ask callers about their experiences in CBP custody. However, at times the Council receives hundreds of calls each week and only has the capacity to answer a fraction of them. As a result, we have serious concerns about whether people in these facilities have meaningful access to their right to an attorney. We are sharing the data we gather and coordinating advocacy with our partners as we gain a better picture of the situation inside the CBP facilities and advocate for expanded access to counsel for those detained there.

#### SPOTLIGHT

### **Mousa's Story**

IJC connects hundreds of people with legal representation that can change the course of their lives. One of these individuals is Mousa, who our partners in Colorado connected us with when he was being detained by ICE at the detention facility in Aurora, CO. Mousa is from an East African country where he faced persecution because his family was perceived to be a religious minority. Tragically, he fled his country alone after his family were killed.

Mousa was just 17 years old when he crossed the US border, but in violation of the law, CBP disregarded his proof of identity and detained him as an adult. Our local partners began representing him and secured a dental exam to try to prove his age, but it was unsuccessful. To continue fighting for Mousa, they referred his case to us.

Our team successfully challenged the errors in his record in immigration court and Mousa was released on bond. At that point, Mousa moved in with a sponsor family in Colorado and enrolled in high school. Then, we took action to get his removal case terminated altogether; Mousa speaks an extremely rare language, and lack of access to a translator meant that he could not get meaningful due process in court.

He said, "I thought I was going to be lost in the jail forever, until my lawyer worked hard to get me out so I can get an education and live freely and without being afraid."

# Informing Decisionmakers and the Public Discourse

Research, Communications, and Storytelling



## Research

The Council's dedicated research team elevates the importance of immigrants in the fabric of America. Through sophisticated data analysis, we ground immigration issues and debates in facts and sound evidence.

#### Highlighting the Potential Electoral Power of Naturalization-Eligible Immigrants

In January, we published a naturalization fact sheet and accompanying blog post showing naturalization rates nationally and in crucial states, highlighting key demographics of immigrants eligible for naturalization and their potential electoral power. Nearly a quarter of immigrants eligible to naturalize nationwide — or 7.4 million immigrants — have not yet started the process. By naturalizing, immigrants are not only protected from deportation, but they can also make their voices heard by voting in elections, more actively engage in civic life, qualify for specific government jobs, and better attain economic security — factors that benefit immigrants and the communities they call home. Our partners have used the research to make their outreach efforts more targeted and accessible. The Congressional Hispanic Caucus also invited us to present the key findings from this factsheet and talk about our broader work.

## Demonstrating the Power of Immigrants in the Great Lakes Region

Immigrants contribute significantly to several Great Lakes, so we released a report in October showing that, in the swing states of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania, the number of immigrants who were eligible to vote exceeded their state's margin of victory in the 2020 presidential election. Our report also highlights the critical role that immigrants play in the revival of the Great Lakes region. Between 2010 and 2022, immigrants were responsible for 79% of the region's population growth. While immigrants continue to take on the hard-to-fill, labor-intensive jobs such as food processors and hand packers, they also comprise 16% of the STEM workforce at a time when manufacturing industries need high-skilled workers like physical scientists, logisticians, and software developers.

#### **Mapping the Impact of Immigrants**

At the beginning of Immigrant Heritage Month in June, we released our new state-level updates for the Map the Impact tool, one of our most cited research products. The New York City Comptroller's Office has cited the data in its report about the benefits of welcoming migrants. Advocates in North Carolina are using the data to fight against a bill that would force sheriffs to comply with ICE. In Arizona, our partner organization Aliento used Map the Impact data in a legislative call to action in February. We planned the release of new state-level data during Immigrant Heritage Month to provide the public with the latest information ahead of the elections.

## Communications & Storytelling

We inform the public with compelling media communications and storytelling that grounds the immigration discourse in facts and sound analysis.

#### **Shaping the National Discourse on Immigration**

In 2024, the Council's staff and resources have appeared in 4,977 news stories in media outlets, not counting reprints, including several prominent published pieces:

- · Vanity Fair: The Global Crisis That No Border Crackdown Can Fix
- The New York Times: Do Politicians Realize How Difficult and Rare Immigrating to the U.S. Really Is?
- MSNBC: Politicians Are Trying to Tie Immigration to Our Housing Crisis. They're Lying.
- The New York Times: The One Thing Not Named Trump that Trump Cares About
- The New York Times: What if Trump Deported Millions of Immigrants?
- The Washington Post: The Practical and Moral Difficulties of Deporting Millions Draws Closer
- The New York Times: A New Hurdle for Asylum Seekers: 4 Hours to Find a Lawyer
- ABC News: Trump again vows to deport millions of migrants. Could he really do it?
- The Atlantic: Asylum Seekers Didn't Create the 'Migrant Crisis'
- All in With Chris Hayes, MSNBC: Biden's Executive Action on the Border, Explained
- Forbes: Why Biden Can't 'Shut Down the Border'—As Both He and Trump Have Suggested
- Rolling Stone: Congress Could Expand Immigrant Surveillance And Make Many Companies Snitch
- The Economist: Can Joe Biden bring order to the southern border without Congress?
- The Associated Press: Iowa defends immigration law that allows local officials to arrest people told to leave US
- HuffPost A Brief History Of Republicans Walking Away From Bipartisan Immigration Deals
- Politico: Federal judge blocks key part of DeSantis anti-immigration law
- The American Prospect: Still Bring Us Your Tired
- Bloomberg: Illegal US Border Crossings Aren't Really Breaking Records
- Fox News: The impact of Texas's anti-immigration law
- USA Today: Can the US handle more immigration? History and the Census suggest the answer is yes.

The Council has also been highlighted on prominent TV shows like 60 Minutes, Last Week Tonight with John Oliver, and Christiane Amanpour. Additionally, we have published over 100 blog posts to our nationally recognized blog, Immigration Impact, which is an important avenue for rapid response communications and factual immigration news. We have also hosted 13 webinars featuring our experts, with up to 1,000 attendees per webinar.

#### SPOTLIGHT

## Uplifting Immigration Perspectives with Empathetic Storytelling

ur storytelling team uplifts immigration perspectives that are thoughtful, thought-provoking, nuanced, and empathetic. The team has helped people publish 82 pieces this year, including a letter to The New York Times editor and two op-eds in Newsweek. Our guidance helps humanize immigration stories and bring those stories to a broader audience. Recent highlights include:

Just two weeks before the presidential election, we placed a piece in <u>The Philadelphia Inquirer</u> about the human cost of mass deportations, citing the Council's mass deportation report. The story is by Foday Turay, a district attorney and undocumented immigrant who risks seeing his family torn apart, should Trump try to deport people like him — those who are married to American citizens, have American-born children, and are the primary breadwinners in their family.

**Marisol Cuevas** is a Dreamer whose work we've helped to place multiple times in <u>The Salt Lake Tribune</u>. She wrote a story in July about the many thousands of Utah Dreamers who are now graduating high school without the ability to apply for DACA — and therefore hold legal jobs. Marisol received an outpouring of supportive and positive comments after her story ran, in part because she shed light on a consequence of immigration policy that many people don't consider: kids with high school degrees who cannot enter the workforce and both the emotional and economic impact this has on Utahans.

Jenn Budd is a former Border Patrol agent who has grown disillusioned with conservative approaches to securing the border. Her article about the harmful psychological impact of border policy on both migrants and Border Patrol agents ran in *The Orange County Register* as well as all 11 outlets in the <a href="Southern">Southern</a> California News Group. In her piece, Jenn explains how few Americans see the human impact of border policies on the mental health of Border Patrol agents.

This spring, over 1,000 people watched the storytelling team's first webinar about the 250,000 children of high-skilled immigrants who are at risk of having to self-deport when they turn 21. They interviewed a family from India, whose father was recruited by an American company and whose daughter, a future doctor, will fall out of status in mere months. After the webinar, the team polled a selection of viewers. 150 attendees pledged to share the issue with family and friends and over 100 pledged to reach out to their congressperson. Of 211 poll respondents, 210 said the webinar increased their empathy toward documented Dreamers and their families.

## Building a More Welcoming Country from the Ground Up:

State and Local Initiatives, Cultural Exchange, and the Center for Inclusion and Belonging



Global Talent Chamber Network convening in Columbus, Ohio

## State and Local Initiatives

We engage business leaders, coalitions, nonprofit organizations, and policymakers nationwide to build a welcoming environment for newcomers in states and local communities.

## Equipping Advocates with Legislative Intelligence, Research, and Toolkits

Our state and local team tracks immigrant-related legislation in all 50 states and supports our partners, including legislators, advocates, and business leaders, in advancing pro-immigrant or defeating anti-immigrant policies by providing timely updates, data, research reports, technical assistance, talking points, testimony, and letters of support. In 2024, we have tracked more than 800 immigrant-related bills and provided weekly updates via external trackers to our partners and stakeholders, including the White House.

States are increasingly at the forefront of advancing positive immigrant-related policies that impact the well-being of immigrants and refugees living in their communities. This year, we supported 17 pro-immigrant bills related to the creation of Offices of New Americans, language access, occupational licensure, and funding to support migrant integration. We released reports on the growing demand for healthcare workers in <a href="New York">New York</a>, <a href="Michigan">Michigan</a>, and <a href="Massachusetts">Massachusetts</a>. By supporting pro-immigrant policies that promote the successful integration of newcomers, the Council is helping to create more welcoming communities where newcomers have access to the resources they need to succeed, have their contributions recognized, and can fully participate in their communities.

Equally important is pushing back against state policies that harm immigrants and communities overall. As some states have pursued anti-immigrant policies like Texas' SB4 and other similar legislation, it is vital to provide our partners with tools and resources to push back against these harmful policies.

In March, the Council partnered with the Refugee Advocacy Lab and the International Rescue Committee to publish a toolkit on countering anti-immigration policies to equip advocates with information, tools, and strategies to challenge unjust immigration laws in their communities. We also provided research, data, and talking points to local partners and state legislators related to five anti-immigrant bills. By supporting partners on the ground, the Council helps ensure that evidence-based data and the stories of impacted community members are uplifted to create thoughtful, fact-based arguments to defeat or reduce the harm of anti-immigrant state policies.

### Collaborating with Business Leaders

In October, the Global Talent Chamber Network (GTCN) convened in Columbus, Ohio, bringing together 20 chamber of commerce leaders from 17 chambers across the U.S., including chambers from Ohio, Utah, Michigan, Kentucky, Wisconsin, Arizona, Pennsylvania, and Texas. Business leaders learned from experts and from one another about how the business community can collaborate more closely with its immigrant and refugee neighbors to ensure a more equitable future where everyone can thrive and contribute to the economy. The GTCN convening also showcased our work with business leaders and chambers, especially in Ohio. During the convening, we gathered support for a

<u>business letter</u> urging the Biden administration to address work permit backlogs by prioritizing the processing of initial and renewal permit applications. Over 100 signatories, representing national, state, and local businesses and employers in 25 states, signed the letter. As a result of this advocacy, the Department of Homeland Security announced a final regulation in December to extend work permits for 540 days.

### **Expanding Our Network of State Advocates and Decision-Makers**

Our Office of New Americans (ONA) State Network continues to grow, reaching 22 members with the addition of Pennsylvania, New Mexico, and Hawaii this year. Since the Council and World Education Services began co-convening the ONA Network in 2019, its membership has more than tripled in size from six states to 22, representing nearly 30 million immigrant residents across the country. This accounted for two-thirds of the total immigrant population in the United States in 2022, reaching a critical mass of red, blue, and purple states that have invested in immigrant inclusion and economic development.

As states began encountering increasing migrant arrivals from the southern border, we traveled with a group of 15 ONA staff from 10 states on a site visit to San Diego to better understand federal, state, and non-governmental organization (NGO) operations in the city and at the border. The group met with Border Patrol and CBP's Office of Field Operations to tour a migrant processing center, the border wall, and the San Ysidro Port of Entry. We ended the trip with a visit to Jewish Family Service of San Diego to better understand nonprofits' role in helping migrants travel to interior cities. Attendees brought their learnings back to their home states to inform their states' own responses to new arrivals.

In November, we held our annual ONA convening in Washington, D.C., where we celebrated the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the network. The convening, our largest to date, took place just after the election, allowing ONAs to come together to plan for the incoming Trump administration and interface with federal partners. Nearly 40 representatives from 18 ONA states received a post-election briefing from the Council's Policy team and exit poll analysis of voter sentiments on immigration from the Immigration Hub. The convening concluded with a private meeting with highlevel federal officials from the White House, DHS, and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, among others.



Office of New Americans (ONA) State Network convening in Washington, D.C.

#### **Growing Our Influence in Texas**

Our work in Texas continues to grow and is vital to making the case for commonsense immigration policies across the state and at the federal level. Through the Council's work in the state, including our 160-member business coalition Texans for Economic Growth (TEG), we bring diverse stakeholders together to support pro-immigrant policies and push back against harmful policies and rhetoric. This work is led by two on-the-ground organizers who serve as thought leaders, resources, and champions of immigration among the Texas business community. We work to reframe the conversation about immigration to demonstrate the tremendous impact that immigrants have on Texas communities and the Texas economy. For example, in July, with the guidance of our Houston organizer, Houston's NRG Arena hosted more than 2,200 people from 121 countries who took the oath to become U.S. citizens in a historic ceremony. The Council's state and Houston organizers, along with several TEG members, attended the event to celebrate the remarkable achievement of thousands of immigrants in Houston.

Photo: Houston's largest-ever naturalization ceremony at NRG Arena



Additionally, this year, we launched research reports on the economic contributions of immigrants in Houston, Dallas, and the Midland metro area. This research is a critical tool for bringing more businesses into the conversation around immigration. The Houston report was released at a special event hosted by Amegy Bank and the Texas Association of Business that drew more than 130 business leaders, government officials, and community members. The Midland report was utilized by the Midland and Odessa Chambers of Commerce for a joint D.C. fly-in with a moderated panel on immigration. We also launched five localized reports with

TEG on *Immigrants in Texas Border Communities*, including Brownsville, El Paso, Laredo, McAllen, and Middle Rio Grande Valley. The reports demonstrated that immigrants living along the border have contributed billions of dollars in taxes, spent billions of dollars that are reinvested back into their community and across the state, and helped fill workforce gaps in different industries, which are critical to maintaining the vibrant Texas economy.

#### **Creating Welcoming Communities**

Despite recent cuts in spending on federal programs that support local welcoming work and an increase in harmful political rhetoric, communities across the U.S. continue to push forward immigrant inclusion initiatives and are committed to creating more welcoming communities where all residents can thrive. This is evident in the strong commitment of the Gateways for Growth communities, who push forward immigrant inclusion initiatives, relying on the Council's data to showcase the demographic and economic contributions of newcomers. Four communities in our fifth and most recent G4G cohort — South Bend, Indiana; Fort Wayne, Indiana; Baltimore County, Maryland; and Santa Fe, New Mexico — have launched strategic welcoming and immigrant inclusion plans since December 2023.

While attending Welcoming America's annual Welcoming Interactive in Dallas in April, the Welcoming America and Council G4G team brought together 25 G4G alumni from communities including Columbus, Salt Lake City, and New Orleans. Throughout the summer, the G4G team also held five focus groups with 23 current and past program participants across 20 communities to solicit feedback on the G4G experience and how the program can be improved in the future.





Top: Council staff at a Gateways for Growth convening Bottom: Welcoming Interactive in Dallas, Texas

## **Center for Inclusion & Belonging**

The Center for Inclusion and Belonging (CIB) uses narrative and culture change strategies to counter biases, prejudices, and "othering" while advancing the inclusion and belonging of everyone in the United States.

## Reaching New Audiences through Belonging Begins with Us

Belonging Begins with Us (BBWU) uses high-profile partnerships to extend its message to new audiences in the places and spaces where they live, work, and play. Through these partnerships, the BBWU campaign continues to reach audiences nationwide with positive, impactful messaging about creating a more welcoming nation where everyone can belong. Since the campaign's launch in December 2020, it has garnered over \$95 million in donated media, and its content has reached millions of viewers including airing during the vice presidential debate on CNN in October 2024 including airing during the vice presidential debate on CNN in October 2024 and twice during election night coverage on Fox News in November 2024.

On March 5, BBWU partnered with the Team Up Project (led by founding members Catholic Charities USA, Habitat for Humanity International, Interfaith America, and the YMCA of the USA) to release a new "Shared Table" <a href="public service announcement (PSA)">public service announcement (PSA)</a> encouraging people to come together across lines of difference to cultivate stronger, more connected communities. The PSA highlights opportunities for people from all walks of life to connect through community activities such as book clubs, volunteering, and potluck meals. Created by Avoq, the film is a montage

of human connection featuring people engaging with one another around various types of tables that represent opportunities to get to know others and create more resilient and connected communities. It has been distributed to more than 1,800 TV stations across the country and directs audiences to a dedicated landing page on the campaign website <a href="BelongingBeginsWithUs.org/TeamUp">BelongingBeginsWithUs.org/TeamUp</a>, featuring real stories of belonging, a guided quiz that prompts users to reflect on their own sense of belonging, and bridgebuilding actions people can take to help others in their local community feel that they belong. The work is currently being promoted across Ad Council, American Immigration Council, Team Up Project, and BBWU social media channels, with a combined following of nearly 3 million people.

BBWU also collaborated with The David J. Sencer Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Museum and CDC's Offices of Minority Health and Health Equity as they curated an exhibition highlighting the social determinants of health, entitled Health Is a Human Right: Achieving Health Equity. This exhibition, running from November 25, 2024 through August 1, 2025, plans to present case studies of how local, state, and federal governments, tribal nations, nongovernmental organizations, and activists are advancing solutions to achieving health equity in communities across the United States. As part of their work to propose solutions to achieving health equity in the U.S. in the context of a historic narrative, they will be featuring Alex Albadree's artwork, originally developed in 2023 for Belonging Begins and Us and Amplifier. This partnership connects the concept of belonging, visualized in beautifully crafted digital illustrations by an immigrant artist, to important themes surrounding health equity.

#### Crafting Compelling Narratives in Our Community of Practice

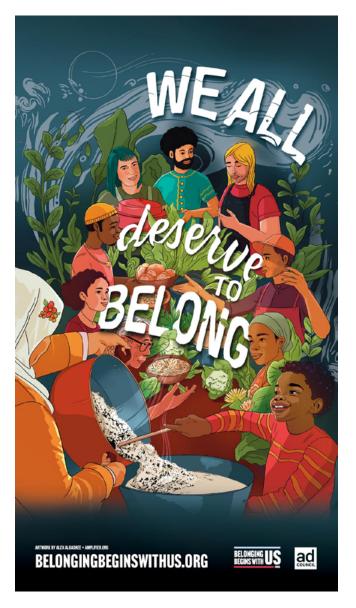
This year, in partnership with the Othering and Belonging Institute at UC Berkeley and New Pluralists, we led a Community of Practice (CoP) focused on advancing the field of narrative change. Narratives shape how people understand their worlds and process new information. The Council has embraced narrative strategy as an important tool that helps our organization and movement to advance collective belonging across the country, depolarize around contentious issues, and seed the kinds of individual and institutional practices that help build more welcoming communities. This is nascent and collective work, and the CoP provided space for our staff to share insights, ask questions, and learn with other leading narrative practitioners. We brought these online conversations into the real world and strengthened new network relationships with the transatlantic Democracy & Belonging Forum and New Pluralists with a pre-conference lab at the 2024 Othering and Belonging Conference in Oakland, California. During the convening, we brought together leading experts and practitioners to discuss bridging and narrative strategies and plant seeds for new collaborations.

The Council is thrilled to be meaningfully impacting the narrative change space and uplifting our core learnings from other programs, such as the BBWU campaign. Because of our work in this space, we were invited to propose a narrative change panel for SXSW 2025, which is currently under review.

#### Advancing Belonging Among Key Stakeholders

Our CIB team continues to provide thought leadership and share our learnings by participating in panels and giving keynote addresses at catalytic convenings. In January, CIB staff gave the keynote address at the Levitt Foundation's annual convening in Los Angeles, underscoring the importance of utilizing public space and the arts to advance belonging across increasingly diverse cities and communities in the United States. In February, during a plenary presentation at the Working Group on Resettlement in Sydney, Australia, which brought together governments, civil society, and refugee leaders, CIB staff presented

on the importance of narratives in building welcoming communities. In April, CIB staff spoke on a panel on Migration and Belonging at the Othering and Belonging Conference. The CIB has a unique think-and-do tank model, and sessions like these are critical opportunities for us to share our findings, be in dialogue with other practitioners, and advance the theory and practice of bridge-building and belonging work.



Artwork by Alex Albadree

## **Cultural Exchange**

We sponsor intern and trainee programs at host organizations across the United States, promoting experiences that build connections and understanding across cultures.

## Bringing New Talent to U.S. Companies

Cultural exchange promotes the exchange of ideas, research, mutual enrichment, and connections across cultures. Since 2003 (trainees) and 2007 (interns), the Council has hosted and facilitated about 500 J-1 interns and trainees per year, providing direct support to exchange visitors, companies, and attorneys from applications for J visa sponsorship through alumni engagement. With our prestigious new Research Scholar designation, the Council is working on expanding and growing our J-1 program.

In October, we were thrilled to launch ResearcherUSA.com, a comprehensive resource detailing how the Research Scholar designation can be utilized across industries and contexts. This information is particularly important as the Research Scholar designation has historically only been utilized by major corporations and institutions of higher education, but the visa category is more flexible than its reputation. The Council developed this resource in partnership with CulturalVistas, the Council on International Educational Exchange, and the Institute of International Education to raise awareness of the multitude of positions that may be compatible with a Research Scholar visa.

We also continue to promote our program through educational sessions and webinars, which reached more than 250 people this year. We are leveraging our partnership with the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) to help immigration lawyers better understand the opportunities and requirements. We hosted an in-person event at the Florida AILA Conference in Miami in February, and have hosted five additional webinars for the AILA Roundtable, Missouri/Kansas AILA Chapter, Lorman Educational Services, AILA Canada, and the Latin American Association of AILA.

As we grow, we have also made substantial infrastructure improvements to ensure we can continue to provide a hightouch, high-quality experience. This year, we implemented a new case management system with functionality for sponsors, allowing for seamless drafting of training plans directly within the platform, and integrating with our current information system. During the upgrades of our systems, we have reduced the time to create a Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) record by 50%, migrated hundreds of records, and are working to reduce the time to process insurance enrollments. We also added custom dashboards and smart data features to enhance efficiency and decision-making.



## **Notable Publications & Media**

#### **PUBLICATIONS**

- Mass Deportation: Devastating Costs to America, Its Budget and Economy
- The Emergency National Security Supplemental Appropriations Act Analysis
- Torrance Report
- · Ohio, We Have a Problem
- Naturalization in the U.S.
- Debunking the Myth of Immigrants and Crime
- H-2A Workers in U.S. Agriculture
- The Expanding Role of H-2B Workers
- Immigrants in the Great Lakes Region
- · The Growing Demand for Healthcare Workers in MA
- The Growing Demand for Healthcare Workers in NY
- The Economic Contributions of Immigrants in Michigan's Workforce
- Contributions of New Americans in Michigan
- The Economic Contributions of Immigrants in Texas Border Communities
- Empowering Texas: Immigrants' Contributions to the Energy Industry, Construction Industry, and Healthcare Industry
- New Americans in Houston: A Snapshot of the Demographic and Economic Contributions of Immigrants in the Houston Metro Area
- Economic Impact Report: New Americans in Dallas
- Blog: Volunteers Needed for Credible Fear Interview Preparation in CBP Hotline
- · Blog: Showdown Between Texas Authorities and the Federal Government Headed to the Supreme Court
- Blog: New Americans in Houston Report Launched at Regional Event