



TERRA LAWSON-REMER

CHAIR

**SUPERVISOR, THIRD DISTRICT
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: September 30th, 2025

04

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

**ACCEPTING PHILANTHROPIC FUNDING FROM THE CONRAD PREBYS
FOUNDATION TO SUPPORT THE IMMIGRANT LEGAL DEFENSE PROGRAM
(DISTRICTS: ALL)**

OVERVIEW

Across San Diego County, communities are increasingly living in fear as federal immigration crackdowns escalate, tearing families apart and destabilizing neighborhoods. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) arrests in the County have increased by over 400% this yearⁱ, with indiscriminate raids hitting neighborhood restaurants, Home Depot parking lots, and even near elementary school drop-off zones. San Diegans have voiced in strong opposition to these actions, as families are displaced and loved ones detained, often with no criminal record, by agents carrying out violent and chaotic arrests.

As family members are swept up in these raids, they are left vulnerable to an immigration system rigged against them, one that denies even the basics of due process and a fair chance to make their case. Many detained by ICE have legitimate claims for relief, including asylum seekers fleeing violence, dangerous conditions, and political persecution. For generations, our nation has stood as a refuge for such stories, offering protection and pathways for people to contribute to our communities and strengthen our regional economy. That promise is now under direct attack.

Immigration courts are unlike every other court system in the United States: they do not guarantee the right to an attorney. Families swept into these proceedings are left to face federal prosecutors alone, with no public defender to stand beside them. Without representation, cases are too often decided unfairly.

Launched in 2021, San Diego County's Immigrant Legal Defense Program (ILDP) was the first of its kind effort to provide free legal representation to people in removal proceedings. More than 2,000 cases have since received services and the results are stark: without an attorney, only 5

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percent of people prevail in immigration court; with an attorney, the success rate rises to 66 percent. That difference has kept families together, prevented children from being returned to danger, and upheld the principle that due process applies to everyone. The ILDP is also cost-effective, delivering services at a fraction of the cost of private attorneys.

On September 9 (Item 16), the Board voted to expand the ILDP to cover unaccompanied immigrant children, so kids as young as toddlers are not left to face a federal judge alone.

Given the scale of current federal enforcement raids, demand on this program is rising and the need for new partnerships is stronger than ever. The County has previously strengthened ILDP through collaboration with community-based organizations, legal service providers, and other stakeholders.

Today's action accepts a \$500,000 donation from the Conrad Prebys Foundation, one of San Diego's leading philanthropic institutions, to expand the program and extend representation to more residents. This funding will sustain critical services, promote efficient use of public resources, and ensure that the ILDP remains a cornerstone of the County's commitment to due process and guaranteeing that every resident has a fair day in court.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

CHAIR TERRA LAWSON-REMER

1. In accordance with Administrative Code Section 66 and Board Policy A-112, accept a donation of \$500,000 from Conrad Prebys Foundation for the Immigrant Rights Legal Defense Program (ILDP) and refer to Fiscal Year 2026-27 budget deliberations the establishment of appropriations of \$500,000 in the Public Defender for ILDP based on funds received in the current fiscal year from the Conrad Prebys Foundation.
2. Authorize the Chair of the Board of Supervisors to sign a letter of appreciation on behalf of the County of San Diego to the Conrad Prebys Foundation.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

By accepting money from private foundations, we can better sustain the Immigrant Legal Defense Program (ILDP) to protect individuals facing deportation. The ILDP has proven to be an effective model with 66% of cases resulting in a substantive outcome. San Diego residents stand to benefit from this program and ensuring due process is at the core of the immigration raids in our region.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

This action supports long-term community resilience by prioritizing local resources to protect due process. Promoting legal representation and stable families reduces the risk of unjust deportations, strengthens trust in government, and fosters the social cohesion that underpins a safe and sustainable region.

FISCAL IMPACT

Funds for these Recommendations are not included in the Fiscal Year 2025-26 Operational Plan in the Public Defender. If approved, unanticipated revenue of \$500,000 will be accepted in Fiscal

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Year 2025-26 and referred to the Fiscal Year 2026-27 Operational Plan in the Public Defender for support of the ILDP in the coming fiscal year. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

The County of San Diego established the Immigrant Legal Defense Program (ILDP) to ensure that immigrant residents, particularly those facing detention and deportation have access to due process and quality legal representation. Nationally, data shows that individuals in immigration court are ten times more likely to win their cases when they have an attorney. Locally, the ILDP has already demonstrated significant impact by helping families remain together, reducing the trauma of deportation, and ensuring that our community members can fully exercise their rights under the law.

The demand for legal services continues to grow as federal enforcement actions expand and more families, unaccompanied minors, and asylum seekers find themselves navigating complex immigration proceedings. Many individuals facing these challenges cannot afford an attorney, and without legal support are at risk of being removed from the United States without a fair hearing.

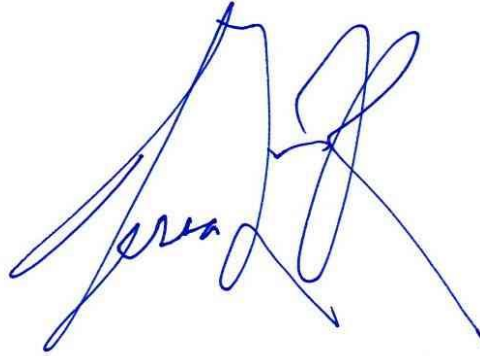
The Conrad Prebys Foundation has awarded the County of San Diego a \$500,000 grant to support the sustainability of the ILDP. This investment will help increase access to legal representation for immigrant residents of San Diego County, strengthen program infrastructure, and ensure that the County continues to protect vulnerable community members. Acceptance of this grant will allow the County to leverage philanthropic partnership to safeguard due process and family unity, while advancing our broader commitment to justice and equity.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

The Conrad Prebys Foundation's donation to support the Immigrant Legal Defense Program advances the Community and Justice initiatives in the County of San Diego's 2025-2030 Strategic Plan by providing legal services to San Diegan immigrants. These services will help to ensure these individuals continue to be supported in their pursuits to return to their families and communities while awaiting their legal outcome.

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Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Terra Lawson-Remer', with a large, stylized flourish extending from the end.

TERRA LAWSON-REMER
Supervisor, Third District

ATTACHMENT(S)
N/A

ⁱ https://alumni.berkeley.edu/california-magazine/online/qa-professor-david-hausman-on-tracking-deportation/?utm_source=chatgpt.com