

September 18, 2020

The Honorable Toni Preckwinkle
Cook County Board President
118 N. Clark St.
Room 537
Chicago, IL 60602

Dear President Preckwinkle,

Our Catholic organizations minister to and accompany immigrants in communities across Cook County and the Chicagoland suburbs. Among the ways we encounter immigrants are:

- education on ways to safeguard their rights and family unity,
- empowering immigrants to participate in service, leadership formation, and advocacy,
- community outreach to individuals who need emergency assistance and immigration-related support, and
- immigration legal services to individuals eligible to receive immigration benefits and legal consultations and assistance regarding most immigration family matters.

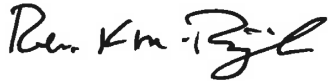
We do all this because we are urged by Jesus to concern ourselves with the well-being of our immigrant brothers and sisters, heeding his words in the parable of the last judgment saying, “Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.” (Matthew 25:40)

Consistent with this concern for our immigrant community, we wish to express our support for the creation and funding of a dedicated Immigration Unit within the Cook County Public Defender’s Office. Last year, approximately 1,500 persons did not have legal representation in their bond hearings before the Chicago Immigration Court, according to a study by Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC) at Syracuse University. Through a dedicated Immigration Unit, the Cook County Public Defender’s Office could provide full legal services to non-citizen criminal defendants from attorneys experienced in immigration law and criminal law. This could help prevent family separation due to detention or deportations that would otherwise occur in many of these cases. Families are central to our communities; they must be strengthened and supported, not undermined by separating children from their parents.

We understand that the County is facing difficult decisions in the FY 2021 budget. However, we ask that rather than reducing funding for critical legal assistance provided by the Cook County Public Defender’s Office, funding for the Office should include establishment of this Immigration Unit. Non-citizen criminal defendants have the right under *Padilla v. Kentucky* to be adequately represented and to be informed of possible immigration consequences of criminal proceedings. Having this dedicated Immigration Unit would help public defenders in Cook County better fulfill their duty to protect this right. The Unit would also allow for attorneys experienced in immigration law to help these non-citizens address their underlying immigration status by determining if they are eligible for U.S. citizenship, U- or T-visas, or relief under VAWA. It would also allow them to represent immigrants from across the Midwest who are facing detention and deportation in the Chicago Immigration Court.

As you consider the FY 2021 budget for the County, we urge you to provide the necessary funding to create this dedicated Immigration Unit within the Public Defender's Office so immigrants can receive adequate legal representation and to help end separation of families.

Sincerely yours,



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Commissioner Bill Lowry, 3rd District
Commissioner Stanley Moore, 4th District
Commissioner Deborah Sims, 5th District
Commissioner Donna Miller, 6th District
Commissioner Alma Anaya, 7th District
Commissioner Luis Arroyo, Jr., 8th District
Commissioner Peter N. Silvestri, 9th District

Commissioner Bridget Gainer, 10th District
Commissioner John P. Daley, 11th District
Commissioner Bridget Degen, 12th District
Commissioner Larry Suffredin, 13th District
Commissioner Scott R. Britton, 14th District
Commissioner Kevin Morrison, 15th District
Commissioner Frank J. Aguilar, 16th District
Commissioner Sean M. Morrison, 17th District