

This letter was sent electronically to the California State Senators and Assemblymembers representing San Francisco, Marin, and San Mateo Counties

May 30, 2023

Re: Request to Support Addback of Funds for Catholic Charities Immigration Removal Defense Program Serving San Francisco, Marin, and San Mateo Counties

Dear Senator Scott Wiener, Senator Mike McGuire, Senator Josh Becker, Assemblymember Matt Haney, Assemblymember Damon Connolly, and Assemblymember Diane Pappan,

As the CEO of Catholic Charities, I am writing you today to ask for your advocacy and support to help us address a perplexing issue hampering our work. Catholic Charities provides essential human services to more than 70,000 individuals and families in San Francisco, Marin, and San Mateo Counties, including more than 9,000 immigrants.

While the State of California has implemented a new, more sustainable program-based model of funding for Immigration Removal Defense Services, Catholic Charities regrettably was not included among the number of other local legal service providers that recently received State contracts under this new funding model. This omission by the State has essentially defunded Catholic Charities Removal Defense Program in the Bay Area, despite more thirty years in operation.¹

Our prior, units-of-service contractual agreement with the State allocated payment of 80% of the fees for our Removal Defense services upon case opening and 20% upon case closure when all of the community-based organizations in our funded group completed their cases. We have a backlog of over 200 open cases at this time and no funding to support ongoing case work or court hearings by our attorneys, so we are covering the costs to retain our legal staff through our fundraising efforts. The State adopted the new funding model that we were denied because it understood the prior funding method was fiscally unsustainable for legal providers like ourselves laboring under the current legal immigration system in which Removal Defense cases can take years and even decades to close given the severe backlog of cases in Immigration Court.² The new contractual system with the State would have included payment for our services per new client over the length of the case, which is more effective and financially sustainable.

I ask you to help us now by supporting an addback of funds to ensure our ongoing Removal Defense Program can remain operational. Without additional State funding we plan to close our Removal Defense work as we close the current cases, thereby ending an era of support for the most needy individuals in our Immigration System of Care.

Catholic Charities San Francisco and San Mateo also provides Affirmative Defense, education, and social support services for immigrants throughout the Bay Area. We recently opened a shelter program for unaccompanied children in Marin County funded through the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement. We are committed to serving the most vulnerable members of our community, including thousands of immigrants seeking asylum, representation in removal proceedings, family reunification, and legal status to become fully active participants in the social and civic life of our communities.

I would like to arrange a meeting with you to discuss this matter further and answer any questions you may have.

On behalf of Catholic Charities, we appreciate all you do and your support of our programs and services. Together, we change lives for the better.

Sincerely,



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¹ Of note, while several Catholic Charities agencies in Southern California received the new State funding for Removal Defense, the Catholic Charities agencies operating in Northern California did not, even though Bay Area residents continue to be underrepresented in Immigration Court. In San Francisco alone there were 101,618 cases pending as of April 2023, with only 31 judges serving on the immigration bench. <https://trac.syr.edu/phptools/immigration/backlog/>

² At the end of April 2023, 2.2 million active cases were pending before the Immigration Court, with another 652,644 new court cases so far in FY23. <https://trac.syr.edu/immigration/quickfacts/eoir.html>