



A proposal submitted to:

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From:

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**Introduction:** Catholic Charities' Division of Immigrant and Refugee Services is headquartered just a few miles from Ellis Island, at 80 Maiden Lane in lower Manhattan. There, thousands of immigrants, refugees and asylees from all over the world turn to our team for support. We are the only immigration legal service agency in the city that does not force newcomers with emergency needs to languish on a waitlist for months. Instead, we open the doors of our reception room every Thursday. Just as Ellis Island once was a symbol of opportunity to immigrants, our reception room similarly serves as a significant entry point to hope. Your award would ensure that a warm welcome and compassionate help are provided to New York's newcomers.

**Community Need:**

Following the 2017 presidential inauguration, immigrant communities have experienced challenges on multiple fronts, including: the travel ban; shifting lines on who may qualify for asylum; threats to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and Temporary Protected Status; the detention and deportation of people on orders of supervision; courthouse arrests; and changes to public charge inadmissibility grounds that will make low-income newcomers fearful of accessing essential benefits, like food stamps, that are a proven hand-up. The need for representation in removal proceedings alone is at an all-time high. There are more than 121,000 pending removal cases in the New York Immigration Courts<sup>1</sup>.

Immigrants are turning to Catholic Charities for help in record numbers. For example, our Immigration Hotlines have become exceptionally busy. Between April 2017 and March 2018, immigrants made 51,692 calls for help and received 62,505 referrals. In that same period the following year, those numbers increased to 75,726 and 73,064 respectively, and in the 6-month period of April-September 2019, the hotlines have already responded to close to 50,000 contacts for assistance and provided close to 30,000 referrals for service.

**Our Response:**

As increasingly harsh immigration policies exacerbate the demand for legal services, we have developed ways to serve immigrants on a larger scale. We unite and stabilize immigrant families, protect vulnerable foreign-born children from abuse and neglect, restore hope to immigrants who have been victims of domestic violence and other violent crimes, prevent the return of refugees to countries where they experienced or likely will experience persecution, and help immigrants achieve their dream of becoming United States citizens. This is accomplished through the provision of quality legal services, the distribution and presentation of timely and accurate information regarding immigration law and forms of relief, and the facilitation of English Language learning, cultural immersion programs, and job training courses and programs.

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<sup>1</sup> The Transactional Records Clearinghouse

We work with immigrants of more than 100 nationalities, a majority of whom are originally from Mexico, the Caribbean, Central America and West Africa. We serve clients who reside in all five New York City boroughs and seven counties of the Lower Hudson Valley. More than half of those we serve (55%) do not have legal immigration status; approximately 13% are victims of domestic violence, trafficking, or other violent crimes.

Our commitment to immigrants is rooted in respect for the dignity of each person, and for the value added to our communities of work, family, and faith. Through the following initiatives, our Division of Immigrant and Refugee Services reaches more than 60,000 individuals across New York City and the Lower Hudson Valley each year:

- We assist refugees with their resettlement and integration needs, including settling in a new home, finding work, and learning English. These are men, women and children who have fled conflict, persecution, and deprivation.
- We serve unaccompanied children who have been transferred to federal custodial shelters in the New York City area. We offer these minors and the families with whom they are reuniting legal help, representation, and integration support, including legal and cultural orientations, soccer and English programming, and psychological and medical care.
- We operate the New York State New Americans Hotline and the national Call Center for Custodians of Unaccompanied Minors, which provides basic information and referrals to callers with immigration and reunification questions.
- Our International Center provides English and cultural instruction to vulnerable immigrants who are seeking to move towards citizenship status or, in the case of day laborers, are in need of basic proficiency to navigate day-to-day challenges.
- Our Immigration Legal Services department provides advice and legal representation to immigrants in need.

Newcomers access our services through appointments at more than a dozen sites, including the helpdesk we operate at New York City's Immigration Court, our outreach to Community Schools, large-scale monthly community workshops and clinics, and our growing *pro bono* program. Our weekly Thursday legal intake day at 80 Maiden Lane is a significant entry point for newcomers with an urgent need for help. Each week, more than 100 immigrants crowd into the reception area to be helped, and none leave without meeting with a professional. It is the only place in the city where an immigrant can ask for help, and based on the urgency of his or her need, receive a consultation from a lawyer on the same day. This open-door format saves lives. For example, consider Benjamin's story:

*Benjamin, a 19-year-old youth from Honduras, came to a Thursday intake day to ask for help. We learned that, at the age of five, Benjamin was diagnosed with intestinal cancer and underwent many rounds of chemotherapy. He recovered, but was left with lifelong complications that continually cause him acute pain. By age seven, both of his parents had moved to the United States and left him and his younger brother in the care of relatives.*

*Tragically, these relatives became abusive. At age eleven, an uncle he lived with raped him and his brother in front of each other. From age ten to twelve, another uncle forced him to work 12-hour shifts in slave-like conditions on a lumber mill, even though lifting heavy objects only exacerbated the intense pain Benjamin felt in his intestines. When he was sixteen, gang members began recruiting him to join their ranks. Benjamin refused, and was beaten as a result. He dropped out of school and was afraid to leave home. Benjamin fled to the United States to escape gang violence and his abusive family.*

*When he arrived, Benjamin applied for asylum but was ordered removed in absentia because he was very ill on the day of the hearing. Moreover, the private attorney who was representing him did not remind him of the date of the hearing in advance, and it was later discovered that her license was suspended. After he was ordered deported, Benjamin came to our Thursday intake day to ask for help. We accepted the case and are seeking to reopen his deportation case to properly represent him in court on his asylum claim. The motion to reopen – based on exceptional circumstances, lack of proper notice, and ineffective assistance of counsel – has already been filed and is pending. We also referred Benjamin to Terra Firma, where he is receiving medical treatment for the first time in the United States.*

## **Conclusion**

Support of our Division of Immigrant and Refugee Services staffing and physical infrastructure allows lives to be changed. Behind every immigrant who enters the reception room at 80 Maiden Lane is a story of help and hope waiting to be told, for example:

- An immigrant youth who is now bound for entry to a prestigious New York college, who, in his country of origin could only have chosen between membership in a gang or a life in extreme poverty;
- A father who had been un-lawfully detained for years, but is now reunited with his family and looks forward to singing “You are My Sunshine” to his son each night at bedtime;
- A refugee woman who faced violent attacks and death threats, while pregnant, in her home country because she advocated for the rights of Christians—now living safely with her newborn son in New York.

Immigrants turn to Catholic Charities during times of need and crisis. We hope that you will consider deepening your commitment to welcoming and integrating newcomers.