

New Jersey Consortium for Immigrant Children and Members Hail Nationally Pathbreaking \$3 Million Program for New Jersey's Unaccompanied Minors and Other Immigrant Youth

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The New Jersey Consortium for Immigrant Children, as well as Kids in Need of Defense, American Friends Service Committee, Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Newark, and Community Foundation of New Jersey, applaud New Jersey lawmakers for creating New Jersey's first-ever state-funded program to provide legal representation and case management to unaccompanied minors and similarly situated immigrant youth. The Consortium, a statewide coalition of legal providers, healthcare providers, and community-based organizations, fought, with its members, for the \$3 million initiative, which passed the legislature on Thursday as part of the state's budget deal. **With the Governor's signature, New Jersey will become the second state in the nation after California to create a statewide, state-funded legal representation program for unaccompanied minors, and the first in the nation to include within its scope similarly situated youth, including children arriving from the Remain in Mexico program.**

"Most children and youth whom the government is trying to deport from New Jersey are unrepresented. No one should go to immigration court alone, and it is simply inhumane to demand this of children. Many newly arrived children also struggle to enroll in school, access healthcare, and exercise other basic

rights. We applaud the Governor and the Legislature for answering the moral call to action with this important step,” said **Emily Chertoff, Executive Director of the Consortium.**

Jazmin Margalef, a formerly undocumented youth leader at the Consortium, said: “For many years I struggled to afford legal services, which prolonged my undocumented status and left me in a dark place. Access to free legal services would change my life drastically. I would be able to live a life without fear of the future.”

Consortium members, who have worked in collaboration for years to increase access to justice for immigrant children and youth in New Jersey, welcomed the state’s commitment:

Gilda Holguin, Acting Managing Attorney of the Newark office of Kids in Need of Defense (KIND), a national organization dedicated to representing unaccompanied children in their immigration proceedings, stated: “State funding for representation and case management services for unaccompanied children and similarly situated youth in New Jersey is a huge step toward providing much needed assistance to vulnerable children residing in the state. Many unaccompanied children are fleeing pervasive violence, have been abandoned, or lost their caretakers. Without attorneys to represent them in their deportation proceedings, children risk being sent back to places where they face grave harm and have no one to protect them. KIND applauds Governor Murphy and New Jersey legislators for their leadership in addressing the need for legal representation and access to social services for these kids in our state.”

“There is a huge unmet need for free and expert representation of unaccompanied children in removal proceedings in New Jersey and we commend the state for its leadership in providing public funding to defend these children from deportation. AFSC has been representing immigrant children for many years and we have seen firsthand the significant impact that an attorney has on a child’s case before an immigration judge. No one should have to navigate our oppressive and byzantine immigration system alone and that is particularly true of children,” said **Nicole Miller, Legal**

Services Director at American Friends Service Committee's Immigrant Rights Program.

Kiera LoBreglio, Director of Immigrant and Refugee Services at Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Newark, said: "No child should have to face an Immigration Judge alone. This critical funding moves us one step closer to that goal."

Clinical Professor Randi Mandelbaum of Rutgers Law School, whose clinic represents dozens of unaccompanied minors, said: "This money could not have come at a more critical time. New Jersey expects to receive nearly 5,000 unaccompanied children just this year and this is on top of the thousands that have arrived in previous years. No child should have to appear in court without an attorney, especially against government attorneys who are trying to have them deported."

Johana, a former youth client of a Consortium member, echoed the importance of an attorney, stating: "I wouldn't be where I am today were it not for my attorneys."

The need for state funding to provide legal services for immigrant youth is especially urgent right now, as the number of unaccompanied minors arriving in the United States is set to reach historically high levels this year, with New Jersey typically receiving the fifth-highest number of arrivals of any state. Funding representation for these youth will have far-reaching impacts, as children in removal proceedings are five times more likely to win their legal cases with an attorney. In addition to unaccompanied minors, the appropriation is designed to allow legal providers to represent similarly situated youth, including children coming to New Jersey from the Remain in Mexico program. About 280 families had arrived in New Jersey from the program as of May, based on data from TRAC.