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NYC Public Defenders, Immigrant Advocate Groups Applaud Dismissal of Federal Government Lawsuit Targeting New York's Immigrant Protections

In August, Groups Filed Amicus Brief Defending New York's Landmark Protect Our Courts Act and Other Safeguards for Immigrant Communities

(NEW YORK, NY) — The Legal Aid Society, The Immigrant Defense Project, Sanctuary for Families, LatinoJustice PRLDEF, Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem, Make the Road New York, The Bronx Defenders, and Brooklyn Defender Services applauded the dismissal of the Trump Administration's lawsuit, which had sought to challenge New York's Protect Our Courts Act (POCA) and two executive orders that safeguard immigrant communities across the state.

In August, public defenders and immigrant rights organizations filed an [amicus brief](#) outlining the constitutional, legal, and public-safety imperatives behind New York State's efforts to protect immigrants from civil immigration arrests at state courthouses and in other state buildings, and to limit information-sharing between state employees and federal immigration authorities.

The amici argued that these state laws and policies fall squarely within New York's authority to govern its own institutions, protect public health and safety, and ensure access to justice for all New Yorkers.

"These laws were enacted during the first Trump Administration in direct response to Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) predatory presence at New York courthouses and other state facilities — conduct that spread fear and denied New Yorkers access to the courts and essential state programs," said **Meghna Philip, Director of the Special Litigation Unit at The Legal Aid Society**. "By dismissing this lawsuit, the court has reaffirmed New York's constitutional duty to guarantee equal access to justice, benefits, and services for all residents, regardless of immigration status. That core principle guided the enactment of POCA and these executive orders. Today's decision stands as a powerful rebuke to the second Trump Administration's openly declared campaign against sanctuary jurisdictions. The dismissal makes clear that these attacks will not succeed in undermining New Yorkers' rights."

"Years ago, New Yorkers spoke out against the escalating practice of ICE targeting people in and around state courts where the stakes are high - judges are determining whether to deprive community members of their liberty, separate them from their families, or strip them of their livelihoods," said **Yasmine Farhang, Executive Director of the Immigrant Defense Project**. "Today, whether in state criminal courts or immigration courts, the consensus is clear: using courts as a trap to snatch people undermines due process, instills fear, and harms families. This dismissal of the Trump Administration's lawsuit is a powerful rebuke to efforts to attack our local laws and we will continue to defend New York every step of the way."

“During the first Trump administration, we felt the traumatic impact of ICE in our courts undermining due process, terrorizing community members, and ripping families apart as people tried to follow the legal process,” said **Rosa Cohen-Cruz, Director of Immigration Policy for The Bronx Defenders**. “While similar violence still occurs at 26 Federal Plaza, today’s win reaffirms a core principle: everyone, no matter where they were born, deserves equal rights and full access to our legal system. And when New York State stands up to protect those rights, we win.”

Natalia Aristizabal, Deputy Director of Make the Road New York, said, “The dismissal of the Trump administration’s baseless lawsuit against the Protect Our Courts Act (POCA) is a critical win for all New Yorkers. For years, we have fought to safeguard our communities from Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s (ICE) harmful and predatory practices in our state courts. This decision reaffirms our position that in our state, every New Yorker, regardless of immigration status, has the fundamental right to equal and safe access to state agencies without fear that their loved ones could be abducted or separated from their families. This is why we must support POCA and pass New York for All, which will ensure that New Yorkers are protected not just in our state courts but in our hospitals, schools, and beyond.”

“Protecting victims is critical to a functioning court system, and to public safety for all,” said **Rex Chen, Supervising Counsel for Immigrant Rights, LatinoJustice PRLDEF**. “The court upheld POCA against a baseless attack by the federal government that would have taken us back to the dark period starting in 2017, when ICE disrupted court business and punished crime victims by making warrantless arrests of people attending hearings in New York courts. LatinoJustice joined the fight to resist these abuses and advance POCA then and we remain committed to defend the rights of people under threat.”

“As public defenders, we are bolstered by the Court’s dismissal of the federal government’s lawsuit challenging New York’s Protect Our Courts Act,” said **Lucas Marquez, Director of Civil Rights and Law Reform at Brooklyn Defender Services**. “POCA ensures that New Yorkers who attend court to address critical issues in their lives can do so safely without interference from federal immigration agents, and codifies the long-standing privilege against civil arrests in courthouses,”

“Like all New Yorkers, immigrant survivors have the right to access our courthouses and state facilities without fear,” said **Hon. Judy Harris Kluger, Chief Executive Officer for Sanctuary for Families**. “New York’s protections, including POCA, were created to stop ICE from turning those spaces into zones of intimidation. This dismissal affirms the state’s authority to safeguard immigrant communities. Sanctuary for Families will continue to defend every policy that keeps survivors safe and able to pursue justice.”

Background

New York State Executive Orders 170 and 170.1, issued in 2017 and 2018, restrict warrantless civil arrests in New York State buildings and limit state employee cooperation with federal immigration enforcement. POCA, signed into law in 2020, prohibits civil immigration arrests in and around New York State courthouses without a judicial warrant.

As detailed in the amicus brief, the return of aggressive ICE enforcement in 2025 — including surveillance and arrests at courthouses and state facilities — has once again chilled immigrant participation in the justice system, requiring legal service providers to help their clients navigate an atmosphere of fear and intimidation.

The brief also underscored the public health and safety benefits of these policies. Studies show that when immigrants fear enforcement, they are less likely to appear in court to vindicate their rights, report crimes, or access critical services like healthcare and nutrition assistance — even when legally eligible. By building trust, New York’s laws help ensure safer communities and healthier outcomes for all residents.

The amici included legal service organizations from across the state, collectively representing hundreds of thousands of low-income New Yorkers, including many immigrants and their families.

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The Legal Aid Society is a nonprofit organization that exists for one simple yet powerful reason: to ensure that New Yorkers are not denied their right to equal justice because of poverty. For nearly 150 years, we have protected, defended, and advocated for those who have struggled in silence for far too long. Every day, in every borough, The Legal Aid Society changes the lives of our clients and helps improve our communities.

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