



Fairness to Freedom

The Campaign for Universal Representation

Palante Visuals

The Vera Institute of Justice (Vera) and the National Partnership for New Americans (NPNA) have launched the Fairness to Freedom Campaign to push for legislation that establishes a universal right to federally funded legal representation for anyone facing deportation who is unable to afford it. Our vision is a system in which all people whose life, liberty, or ties to the community are at risk in the immigration system have access to high-quality and independent legal representation.



Why universal representation?

There is currently no right to government-funded legal representation for people in immigration proceedings who face the devastating consequences of immigration enforcement, including detention and deportation. As a result, most people—including an estimated 80 percent of detained deportation cases initiated in the past 20 years—are left to fend for themselves in navigating the complexities of immigration law while facing professional, well-resourced government prosecutors in cases that may result in physical exile from home, separation from family and community, and return to conditions of persecution, violence, torture, or death.¹ Ensuring that immigrants have access to a lawyer also helps to mitigate the harms of the racial inequities in the criminal legal system that flow into the closely linked immigration system.

Although universal representation alone is not enough to undo the decades of systemic harm experienced by immigrants in the United States, it is clear that without representation, many people who have a right to remain in the United States will instead experience deportation, separation from their families, and be forced return to conditions they fled seeking safety.

The Fairness to Freedom Act

The Fairness to Freedom Act of 2023 establishes the right to legal representation at government expense for anyone facing removal from the United States who are unable to afford it. To ensure that right is meaningful, the act will:

- › ensure early, continuous, and full-scope representation;
- › enable high-quality, holistic representation;
- › require the government to facilitate access to counsel for people in its custody;
- › establish an independent Office of Immigration Representation to ensure high-quality, universal representation;
- › work with existing state and locally-funded removal defense programs to provide universal representation; and
- › ensure representation for people facing removal at the border.

Who we are

We are a campaign led by immigrant justice advocates, legal service providers, and government champions in more than 55 jurisdictions across the country that have established local and state publicly funded deportation defense programs.

We believe that the voices of those most directly impacted by immigration enforcement are central to our coalition and campaign. We envision a future in which the dignity and freedom of every person in the immigration system is a priority, and we are fighting for the core premise of universal representation—that “everyone means everyone.”

¹ These numbers were pulled from TRAC’s website by first clicking on “Deportation Cases” as the “Case Group”; then selecting “Detained” as the “Custody”; and finally selecting “Represented” as the final filter option (but not clicking on anything within that filter). The data is updated as of February 2023. Source: Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC), “New Proceedings Filed in Immigration Court,” accessed March 14, 2023, <https://trac.syr.edu/phptools/immigration/ntanew/>.

Our principles

We're building a multi-year strategy rooted in the following principles:

- › **It is rooted** in the grassroots movement for universal representation and immigrant rights;
- › **It is sustainable.** We are prepared to invest in the long-term with the goal of passing the Fairness to Freedom Act;
- › **It is focused** on advancing universal representation in partnership with other movement priorities that advance freedom and justice for immigrants and their families; and
- › **It is flexible**, so that the campaign can bring its strength to bear on opportunities for action—in Congress, in appropriations battles, and through executive action—and it is strategic in building public support for universal representation while we create the government and community capacity necessary to guarantee due process for all.

Join us

Support the Fairness to Freedom Campaign for Universal Representation [here](#) by formally signing on as a partner. You can find more information about the campaign at [Vera](#) and [NPNA](#).

Reach out to your Senators and [Representatives](#) to ask them to co-sponsor the Fairness to Freedom Act.

You can also access a [recording from a January 2022](#) partner briefing with more details about the campaign.

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