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Department of Justice reverses decision and will “not pause” funding for Legal Orientation Program

York County-based Pennsylvania Immigration Resource Center (PIRC) welcomes DOJ decision to continue funding while legal education program is evaluated.

Attorney General Sessions announced during testimony this afternoon before the Senate Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies that the Department of Justice has reversed their earlier decision to halt the Legal Orientation Program and will continue the Program while an evaluation of the program is conducted.

This reversal has a significant impact on immigrants from communities across Pennsylvania. Since 2006, the Pennsylvania Immigration Resource Center (PIRC) has provided Legal Orientation Program services to more than 18,000 detained immigrants. More than 84% of detained immigrants are unrepresented, and the LOP legal education program prepares immigrants to represent themselves before the immigration court.

“We welcome this decision by the Department of Justice, just 15 days after the announcement that funds would be halted, to continue funding the Legal Orientation Program,” said Mary Studzinski, Executive Director for the Pennsylvania Immigration Resource Center. “We welcome an evaluation of the program. We know from experience and past evaluations that the program increases court efficiencies, saves taxpayer dollars, and reduces the time in detention for immigrants in removal proceedings.” PIRC observes firsthand the positive impact of LOP services on immigration courts and immigrants in detention and PIRC remains committed to providing education to this vulnerable population.

Benefits of Legal Orientation Program

The LOP saves the federal government money by making the courts more efficient. LOP services create efficiencies in the immigration courts and reduce detention costs. A 2012 Vera Institute of Justice report showed that LOP services increased the efficiency of the immigration courts and reduced the days in detention for detained immigrants in removal proceedings.



The LOP provides a basic level of due process. Immigrants in removal proceedings do not have a right to free counsel. Cutting this program eliminates the only means by which many detained immigrants can learn about possible legal options and a legal process that has a fast-moving timeline. For most unrepresented immigrants in detention, the Legal Orientation Program provides their only means to access legal information as they navigate a complex legal system on their own.

PIRC is one of 18 LOP providers in the nation

PIRC provides LOP services at the York County Prison in York, PA and the Berks County Residential Center in Leesport, PA. PIRC's mission is access to justice and the Legal Orientation Program is central to this mission. The LOP provides detained immigrants with a basic level of due process – this means leveling the playing field for access to information and available resources about the legal process.

About PIRC:

PIRC was founded in 1996 on the principles of service and access to justice in response to the indefinite detention of the refugees of the Golden Venture. PIRC's work is focused on giving voice to the most vulnerable immigrants in detention and in our community. PIRC provides free, legal services, education, and advocacy to help vulnerable, indigent immigrants obtain or protect their legal status. PIRC serves nine counties within south central Pennsylvania including Adams, Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin, Fulton, Lancaster, Lebanon, Perry, and York. To learn more about PIRC visit www.pirclaw.org.

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