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Department of Justice Decision to Halt Legal Orientation Program increases taxpayer expense and harms immigrant families in the community

The Pennsylvania Immigration Resource Center has been a provider of Legal Orientation Program legal education services since 2006 serving residents from communities across Pennsylvania.

The Department of Justice made the decision on Tuesday to halt the Legal Orientation Program (LOP), a legal education program that prepares immigrants to represent themselves before the immigration court. The Pennsylvania Immigration Resource Center (PIRC), a nonprofit immigration legal services provider in south central PA, has provided Legal Orientation Program services for more than 12+ years, and in 2017 provided LOP services to more than 2,400 detained immigrants to prepare them for their immigration court hearing. Immigrants are held in civil detention to ensure they appear at their immigration hearing, and overwhelmingly - more than 84% - must prepare their own case and represent themselves in immigration court. Individuals receiving PIRC's LOP services are primarily residents of Pennsylvania and asylum seekers from war torn countries around the world.

PIRC provides LOP legal education services that explain to individuals what they can expect during their immigration hearing, how to assess whether they have any legal options to remain in the U.S., and whether their best option is to accept removal. "LOP services not only prepare immigrants for their removal hearings, but they create efficiencies in the immigration courts and reduce detention costs," said PIRC Board Chair Andrew Mahon. A 2012 Vera Institute of Justice report presented to the Senate Appropriations Committee showed that LOP services increased the efficiency of the immigration courts and reduced the days in detention for detained immigrants in removal proceedings. This reduction in

the length of proceedings and average detention time saves taxpayer money and creates efficiencies in a backlogged court system struggling to support its caseload.

While the government benefits from the cost and time efficiencies created by LOP services, the benefit to immigrants facing removal from the country cannot be overstated. “Cutting this program eliminates the only means by which most detained immigrants can learn about possible legal options and a legal process that has a fast-moving timeline,” said Mary Studzinski, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Immigration Resource Center. For most immigrants, the Legal Orientation Program provides their only means to access due process as they navigate a complex legal system on their own. “Beyond the stripping of basic due process from noncitizens who find themselves unrepresented in the immigration court system, the halting of this program defies common sense. Congress has approved appropriations for this program. It is our hope that they will act to ensure that the Department of Justice reinstates the program as soon as possible,” said Ms. Studzinski. PIRC observes firsthand the positive impact of LOP services on immigration courts and immigrants in detention and remains committed to providing education to this vulnerable population.

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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