

THE JUSTICE JOURNAL

THE OFFICIAL FLORIDA IMMIGRATION LAW & JUSTICE CENTER NEWSLETTER



Dear Florida ILJ Family,

As the summer sun shines brightly on the eve of fall, we reflect on the changes of what this summer has brought to Florida Immigration Law and Justice Center (Florida ILJ). For many people across the country, summer time is a time of planning vacations and leisure activities. One might assume that many industries, including immigration law, experience a summer slowdown, however summer 2023, has been busier than ever for Florida ILJ.

During this summer, we have seen an increase in demand for services. With the new law SB 1718 that went into effect on July 1st, we saw an uptick in calls for services from affected individuals seeking advice as well as calls for information from people and organizations all over the state. Please read all about how Florida ILJ has been involved in the efforts to help protect those affected by SB1718.

In an effort to be able to meet an ever-growing demand for services, we also added two new members to the Florida ILJ Team: an attorney, Aleksandra Lopez; and, a paralegal, Tanya Fernanda. Their combined expertise and fresh perspectives are sure to help Florida ILJ continue to help our immigrant neighbors achieve their dreams.

Although summer was particularly busy for us, we hope that you have had time to relax and are re-energized and ready to recommit to justice. Together we can create a more inclusive and compassionate society for all.

In Gratitude,
Nicole León

IN THIS ISSUE

SB 1718 2 Months Later
- 2

New Team Members -
2

Florida Hispanic
Heritage - 3

Upcoming Events - 4

TWO MONTHS INTO SB1718

SB 1718, often referred to as Florida's immigration law, went into effect on July 1, 2023. The weeks after it was signed into law and before it was set to go into effect, were a busy time for many immigration law practitioners, including Florida Immigration Law and Justice Center. From holding several "Know Your Rights" sessions focused on the effects of SB 1718, to participating in townhall meetings addressing the impact and intent of the bill, Florida ILJ's Executive Director, Nicole Leon, was busy trying to inform and protect as many immigrants from impact of this new law.

The new law, which criminalizes travel by undocumented immigrants into the state of Florida, amongst other things, has been criticized and challenged in a lawsuit filed by Florida civil rights and legal advocacy groups including the ACLU of Florida, Americans for Immigrant Justice, the Southern Poverty Law Center, and American Immigration Council, in part due to the bill's broad and not well-defined use of the term, "inspection," as well as the fact that the state is trying to regulate an area of law which is reserved for the federal government.



First UMC Ft. Pierce and Iglesia de Cristo held a joint event where they invited Nicole León to present about SB1718

Florida ILJ has been participating in bi-weekly meetings sponsored by CLINIC (Catholic Legal Immigration Network) with other Florida-based organizations serving immigrant populations so as to track incidents where the law has been enforced, gathering information as to misinformation within communities so as to correct them, and also to gather points to be discussed and brought up on advocacy efforts for proposed legislation changes.

According to the information gathered during these meetings and following the tracking efforts gathered by Florida Immigration Council, the majority of enforcement incidents under the new bill have been arrests made of those driving into the state with undocumented aliens. But still, information has been sparse and enforcement reports are rare.

Earlier this month, we received a call from an immigrant now living in New Jersey asking for advice related to SB1718. He, his wife, and child fled their country of Venezuela and entered the US through the Southern border earlier this year. They intended to come live near Orlando, where they had some family and informed ICE about their intention when they entered. In June, due to fears about SB1718 they left Florida and moved to New Jersey. The day they called us, they were asking for advice as to whether it was safe for them to fly back to attend their Master Calendar Immigration Court hearing scheduled for the next day. In light of the vagueness in the language of the bill, we had to advise caution in travelling but also letting them know about the repercussions missing their court hearing - which could result in an *in-absentia* deportation order. This is just one example of how immigrants are being impacted by this law - they risk being detained even when trying to do what is right and be present at their court hearing.

Ultimately, this client did end up coming to Orlando without incident, but the uncertainty of the situation is causing so many to flee or live in fear of seeking out help.

Florida, known as, "The Sunshine State," has long been a destination for people seeking a better life, a place to call home, and the opportunity to achieve their dreams. Our state's rich cultural tapestry owes much to the diverse backgrounds of the people who have chosen to make Florida their home. It's time that we recognize the contributions made by our immigrant residents rather than creating laws that drive our neighbors away.



Florida ILJ Executive Director, Nicole León, speaking on a panel at a LUIAC-Sponsored event titled, "Dismantling Injustice" held in Lakeland, FL.

Meet our Newest Team Members

Alekssandra López



Alekssandra joined Florida Immigration Law and Justice Center early July. Her role is that of Legal Coordinator and Attorney. She is the Legal Coordinator for a grant held in partnership with Gulf Coast Jewish Family and Community Services and serves clients referred to her through the Florida Center for Survivors of Torture. Alekssandra is a graduate of Barry University School of Law and University of Central Florida. Her legal journey has demonstrated a passion for working in public interest law - especially in matters affecting children. She has experience in both immigration and family law and brings these skills to the Florida ILJ team in hopes that she can make a positive impact on the lives of clients referred to her through our partners.

Tanya Fernanda

Tanya joined the Florida ILJ Team in late August. She is currently in the role of paralegal serving our work in partnership with Learning Empowered on the Citizenship and Integration Grant. Tanya is a graduate of the University of Central Florida where she founded the Immigrant Justice Center at UCF. Her passion has always driven her to be involved in matters affecting low-income immigrants. She has several years experience in immigration serving as a paralegal at various firms as well as a volunteer being a long-time volunteer of IDignity Hope Partnership, and Florida ILJ. Tanya will be Florida ILJ's first DOJ Accredited Representative once we are approved as a DOJ Accredited Organization. This will allow Tanya to represent clients before the USCIS.



Hispanic Heritage in Florida

Starting September 15th and ending on October 15th, we celebrate Hispanic Heritage month. For many throughout the United States, this is a celebration of the contributions that the Hispanic community has made to our culture and diversity, but few states have been as culturally impacted by the Hispanic culture as Florida. Long-known as the gateway to Latin America - Florida is geographically advantaged due to its proximity to the various Spanish-speaking Caribbean islands. It is this proximity that prompted the migration of people from Latin America to Florida many decades ago.

Throughout Florida, whether you are at your local park and witness children and adults alike engage in a game of *fútbol*, or are at a party and hear the sounds of *salsa* or *bomba* music being played, or at Publix where you can opt get a *cortadito* and *croqueta* - it is evident how deeply rooted Hispanic culture is in our state. Even though Florida's Hispanic or Latino community makes up around 27% of the state's population, the counties of Miami-Dade, Osceola, and Hendry have over 50% of their population identify as Hispanic or Latino. Florida ranks third in the country in number of Hispanic/Latinos living here, but it has the greatest diversity of people within the Hispanic/Latino diaspora, with the largest groups represented being Cubans and Puerto Ricans.

At Florida ILJ, our staff is Hispanic as is the majority of our clients. We take great pride in promoting our cultures and those of the people we represent. During a year where Florida has passed a harsh anti-immigrant law, it is even more important to emphasize the positive impact that Hispanics have had on our state - from the culture they have infused to the millions of dollars they contribute to our economy, During this month and all others, let's recognized and honor the contributions of Hispanic immigrants, fostering a more inclusive and prosperous Florida for all!



Upcoming Events:

As we draw closer to the end of another impactful year, we reflect on the journey we've embarked on together. It's a time to celebrate the progress we've made, the challenges we've overcome, and the positive impact we have had on our community - we invite you to join one of our in-person or be part of our yearly Give Miami Day event held virtually.

November:

Sunday, November 5: *Celebrating Citizenship* (Largo, FL)

In the last year, 134 Florida ILJ Clients achieved the final stage of their immigration journey - US Citizenship! Join us celebrate their achievement and raise support to help others achieve their naturalization goals.

Thursday, November 16: *GIVE MIAMI DAY* (Virtual) - Join Florida Immigration Law & Justice Center during this 24-hour online campaign hosted by the Miami Foundation. Be on the lookout for emails as to how you can support us during this annual event and help Florida ILJ surpass last year's numbers and help fund our justice goals.

December

Sunday, December 17th: *Justice Mingle & Jingle* (Miami, FL) Be part of Florida ILJ's end-of-the-year fundraiser at First United Methodist Church of Miami's brand new location located in the heart of Miami's downtown.

Details about all the events above will be posted on our brand new website and social media. Stay tuned for details about how you can raise support to help Florida ILJ continue to provide justice for all.

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Visit our new website

<https://floridailj.org/>