

## The Undersigned Organizations Support the Protect Our Courts Act

Dear members of the New York State Legislature,

We write today to urge the Assembly and Senate to pass the [Protect Our Courts Act \(S425A/A2176\)](#), a bill that will ensure equal access to state court proceedings regardless of immigration status. We have seen an unprecedented escalation in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) using the New York State courts to effectuate civil immigration arrests—[an increase of 1700% over the past three years](#). Squads of ICE officers prey on community members, undermining the effective functioning and constitutional underpinnings of the courts and threatening public health and safety of all New Yorkers. Despite an [April 2019 directive](#) to stop warrantless arrests inside courthouses, ICE directed its officers to [conduct arrests outside](#) of courthouse doors.

We are community-based organizations, unions, civil legal services providers, public defenders, family defenders, victim rights advocates, law schools, faith, and civil rights and liberties groups. The legal service providers in the coalition provide the bulk of indigent legal representation and advocacy in New York State, practicing in criminal, family, civil, and administrative courts. Our clients and community members include adults, children, and families; workers; survivors of violent crime; people accused of crime; and people experiencing discrimination. They are citizens, noncitizens, and mixed-status families and communities.

Since January 2017, we have seen federal immigration officers stalk immigrants in and around New York State court, where they arrest them and place them in civil immigration detention and deportation proceedings or immediately deport them. These arrests mark the resurgence of a long-defunct practice of civil arrests in courthouses—a practice legislatures and courts have regulated for more than a century. The spate of civil arrests that started immediately after President Trump's inauguration has escalated dramatically over the past three years.

ICE courthouse arrests affect everyone. [With arrests up 1700%](#), those disappeared from court have been survivors of violence, youth, people who are mentally ill or homeless, guardians to U.S. citizen children, people who are LGBT, victims of human trafficking, and asylum seekers.

In and around courthouses, ICE agents have physically separated attorneys from clients, thrown individuals to the ground, and refused to display warrants or share any information.

The practice of plainclothes ICE agents roaming New York state courthouses is not only an affront to fundamental constitutional rights, but it also has a [chilling effect](#) on people's sense of safety in accessing courts.

The [Protect Our Courts Act](#) will restore courthouse access across New York State, by making it unlawful for ICE to make a civil arrest while someone is going to, attending or leaving court without a judicial warrant or court order and codifying the Unified Court System directive issued by the Office of Court Administration on April 17, 2019.

**The undersigned strongly support the enactment of the Protect Our Courts Act and urge you to act on this.**

For more information on the Protect Our Courts Act, please visit <https://www.immigrantdefenseproject.org/ice-courts/>.

Respectfully signed,

32BJ SEIU	Flatbush Tenant Coalition
Adhikaar	Fund for Modern Courts
African Communities Together	FWD.us
African Services Committee	Garifuna Community Services
Anti-Defamation League New York	Her Justice
Appellate Advocates	Hofstra Law Clinic
Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund	Hondureños Contra el SIDA
Bronx Immigration Partnership	Human Rights First
Brooklyn Community Bail Fund	Immigrant Defense Project
Brooklyn Defender Services	Immigrant Justice Corps
Center for Appellate Litigation	Kathryn O. Greenberg Immigration Justice Clinic
Center for Safety and Change	L.I. Center for Independent Living, Inc.
Central American Legal Assistance	LatinoJustice PRLDEF
Columbia County Sanctuary Movement	Lawyers for Children
Community Legal Advocates of New York	Legal Aid Society of Rochester
Day One	Legal Services Staff Association, NOLSW/UAW 2320
Emerald Isle Immigration Center	LGBT Bar Association of New York
Empire Justice Center	Long Beach Latino Civic Association
First Church Buffalo Presbyterian Church	

Make the Road New York  
Mobilization for Justice, Inc.  
Nassau Legal Aid Society  
National Immigration Law Center  
Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem  
Neighbors In Support of Immigrants  
Neighbors Link  
New York City Gay and Lesbian  
Anti-Violence Project  
New York Civil Liberties Union  
New York Coalition Against Sexual Assault  
New York County Defender Services  
New York Immigration Coalition  
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest  
New York Legal Assistance Group  
New York Religious Action Center of  
Reform Judaism  
Nobody Leaves Mid-Hudson  
Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant  
Rights  
Northern Manhattan Immigration Coalition  
OLA of Eastern Long Island  
Partnership for the Public Good  
Prisoners' Legal Services of New York

Rockland Immigration Coalition  
Rural and Migrant Ministry  
S.T.R.O.N.G. Youth, Inc.  
Safe Horizon  
Sanctuary for Families  
Sisters of Mercy  
South Bronx United  
The Bronx Defenders  
The Door Legal Services  
The Legal Aid Society  
The Legal Aid Society of Suffolk County  
The Legal Aid Society of Westchester  
County  
The Workers Circle  
Trinity Church Wall Street  
UnLocal, Inc.  
Urban Justice Center  
VIBS  
Violence Intervention Program, Inc.  
Westchester Women's Agenda  
Worker Justice Center of New York, Inc.  
Yam Community Resource, Inc.  
Yonkers Sanctuary Movement