

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:



Governor Cuomo Grants Pardons to 18 Immigrants Facing Harsh Deportation Consequences

IDP Spearheaded Coalition-Wide Advocacy Initiative to Expand Access to Clemency for Immigrant New Yorkers

DECEMBER 27, 2017 - Albany, NY – Governor Andrew M. Cuomo [today granted clemency](#) to 61 New Yorkers. Among those who received clemency were 18 immigrants who have made significant contributions to New York, yet face severe immigration consequences because of their convictions.

“We applaud Governor Cuomo’s leadership in granting pardons to immigrant New Yorkers who deserve and desperately need them so that they can continue to contribute to their families and communities here in New York,” said Alisa Wellek, Executive Director of the Immigrant Defense Project. “In granting these pardons, the Governor is also sending a signal of hope to the immigrant community, which has faced a difficult year of fear mongering and threats, that New York will continue to stand for freedom, human rights, and redemption.”

This past year, the Immigrant Defense Project (IDP) spearheaded an effort with community-based organizations, law school clinics, public defender offices, and legal service providers to expand access to gubernatorial pardons granted for immigrants in New York State. The initiative included coordinating advocacy for dozens of applications submitted by IDP and partner organizations to the Governor’s office on behalf of individuals, most of whom have decade-old convictions.

The following are among the 18 immigrants who received pardons from Governor Cuomo today:

Lorena Borjas, 57, was convicted of Criminal Facilitation in the Fourth Degree in 1994, as a result of being entrapped as a victim of human trafficking. Ms. Borjas, a transgender woman from Mexico, has since become a strong advocate for transgender and immigrant communities across the country, running HIV testing programs for transgender sex workers, and syringe exchange programs for transwomen taking hormone injections. She currently works as an educator at community health centers across New York City, and has received commendations from elected officials, advocates, and community members, including New York City Public Advocate Letitia James. With this pardon, she hopes to obtain citizenship and avoid deportation, in order to effectively continue her advocacy work here in New York State.

Alexander Shilov, 35, was convicted of Petit Larceny and Attempted Petit Larceny, from 2000 to 2004. As a teenager, newly immigrated from Estonia, the son of a hard-working single mother, Mr. Shilov developed a drug addiction leading him to commit the string of misdemeanors that now jeopardize his ability to stay in this country. For the past 13 years, Mr. Shilov has remained sober, and has worked his way from obtaining his GED to becoming a distinguished nurse at a Brooklyn long-term

managed care provider. Additionally, Mr. Shilov frequently gives talks on overcoming addiction at hospital detox units, volunteers as a nurse in New York's Medical Reserve Corps, and provides bilingual services in his Russian-speaking community. A pardon will allow him to fight his current Order of Removal and pave the way for citizenship so that he may continue building a life with his fiancée and two infant children, and continue to support his elderly mother.

Freddy Perez, 53, was convicted of Criminal Sale of a Controlled Substance in the Third Degree and Attempted Criminal Sale of a Controlled Substance in the Third Degree in 1993. Since then, he was worked as an electrician and has taken care of his autistic younger brother. Mr. Perez is an immigrant from the Dominican Republic and hopes to adjust his status to that of citizen. With a pardon, he can achieve this goal, as well as exercise guardianship over his brother.

Additional quotes from partners:

"Lorena has done more than anyone else I know to shine a light on the epidemic of trafficking in transgender communities and to help other trans women escape exploitation," said **Lynly Egyes, Litigation Director at Transgender Law Center**. "Her generosity and self-sacrifice is well known throughout New York State and the country. I am thrilled for Lorena today and grateful that, after her years of selfless work helping others, New York State answered the call when she was in need."

"This is the kind of leadership we need to protect immigrant New Yorkers from the unfair second punishment of deportation. Governor Cuomo is helping to restore humanity in a broken system by these acts of clemency, and we look forward to his continued leadership in this area as more New Yorkers come under threat of permanent separation from their families and homes in New York State."

Alina Das, Co-Director, Immigrant Rights Clinic at New York University School of Law

"I applaud Governor Cuomo for helping immigrant New Yorkers by granting these extremely important pardons. In cases of immigrants with lawful status who face deportation, even for convictions decades old and despite no further arrests, the only hope for many people to stay with their families, at their job and in their communities is by way of a Gubernatorial pardon. Governor Cuomo has given these families a wonderful gift and balanced the extremely unfair immigration system," said **Lisa Schreibersdorf, Executive Director of Brooklyn Defender Services**

"The Legal Aid Society applauds this humanitarian measure. These pardons will give a well-deserved second chance to immigrants at imminent risk of deportation. It is critical that New York continue to do all it can to combat the fear and hate generated by bad federal policies and give relief to those who need it most." **Seymour James, Attorney-in-Chief of The Legal Aid Society**

"Today, the Governor took a critical and positive step toward protecting immigrant New Yorkers. Granting pardons to those who desperately need them allows families and communities to stay together at a time when they are under attack," said **Javier H. Valdes, Co-Executive Director, Make the Road New York**

"We've asked for an executive pardon for our two long-term lawful permanent resident clients who have turned their lives around because the deportation machine makes this the last possible option for people whose lives have been in the US for 20, 30, even 40 years. The federal government sees every immigrant with a criminal past through one lens. We know the reality is more complicated and hope that Governor Cuomo can use his power to redress this injustice."

-Stacy Caplow, Associate Dean for Professional Legal Education, Brooklyn Law School

"As an organization that with both survivors of violence and those who commit it, we see every day the limitations of the criminal justice system's ability to consistently deliver people the healing, justice, and safety they deserve. In this hard and divided moment in our country, it is especially powerful and to the Governor's great credit that some of these pardons will protect people from the adverse immigration consequences that would otherwise have harmed and haunted them and their families."

-Danielle Sered, Executive Director of Common Justice

"As our national immigration policies have become harsh and heartless, Governor Cuomo is showing compassion for immigrant New Yorkers and their families who fear being torn apart by deportations. The pardons from Governor Cuomo will give a second chance to vulnerable immigrants and help them keep their families together."

-Hector Figueroa, President of 32BJ

Previously, Governor Cuomo has granted seven pardons in total to immigrant New Yorkers. Advocates across New York seek to increase the Governor's grant rate to help even more immigrants rebuild their lives. IDP is also supporting advocates in other states interested in expanding pardons for immigrants. For more information, please visit www.immigrantdefenseproject.org.

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About Immigrant Defense Project

The Immigrant Defense Project (IDP) is a New York-based nonprofit that works to secure fairness and justice for immigrants in the U.S. criminal legal and immigration systems. We do this through advocacy, litigation, legal support, and work with community-based organizations.

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