

# Americans for Immigrant Justice

**Q:** What is Americans for Immigrant Justice?

**A:** AI Justice is a not-for-profit law firm that protects the basic rights of America's immigrants. Many of our clients have fallen victim to human rights violations such as slavery, denial of a legitimate asylum claim, abuses while detained and lack of due process in a barely functional immigration court system that does not ensure legal representation for those who face deportation. AI Justice's direct service work informs its broader policy work.

**Q:** How does AI Justice do that?

**A:** Our lawyers have closed over 75,000 cases of vulnerable immigrants from North and South America, Africa, Europe and Asia. We call this the frontlines of the immigration fight. But we also work in Washington D.C. using our intimate knowledge of the problem in the real world to help shape sane and sensible national immigration policies. Further, we take on precedent-setting cases with national implications.

**Q:** Do you believe in open borders?

**A:** No. We believe that the U.S. Government has the right and responsibility to enforce immigration laws. But we also believe that, regardless of their legal status, America's immigrants deserve the basic human rights and due process that we hold as core American values.

**Q:** Who supports you?

**A:** We are funded by various foundations, including the Florida Bar and Ford Foundations as well as numerous concerned and generous citizens – among them some of the most prominent people in Florida and increasingly across the nation. We are also supported by people of more limited means – artists, former media personalities, business people, homemakers, first generation Americans and those whose ancestors were among America's first immigrants.

**Q:** How can you say that you defend the America Dream?

**A:** We defend the American Dream by fighting for what it stands for: justice and human rights. We fight for those whose fundamental rights have been abused. We will fight to prevent the deportation of persons entitled to legal status under our current laws. And we fight for more just laws, in keeping with the core principles that provide the foundation for our democracy and way of life. That is why we are fighting for passage of the DREAM Act.

**Q:** What's the DREAM Act?

**A:** The DREAM Act is a commonsense bill in the U.S. Congress that would help young, undocumented immigrants brought here as children to achieve their full potential and contribute their talents to the country they call home. The DREAM Act would allow those youth who graduate high school to earn legal status and eventually citizenship by meeting a set of stringent criteria. They must graduate high school and maintain good moral character, then attend college or serve in the U.S. military for at least two

years. These kids are as American as anyone born here, with the same aspirations, interests and dreams. As did immigrants who came before them, they will strengthen our nation's economy and communities.

**Q:** There are so many worthy causes out there, why is AI Justice worthy of my support?

**A:** America's broken immigration system hurts everyone in this country, not just immigrants. Keeping 11 million immigrants in the shadows, where they live in fear of deportation, is neither sustainable nor constructive. AI Justice promotes sensible reforms at the federal level, including a path to legalization for deserving immigrants. Such reforms would boost our nation's economy and security while promoting the basic rights of all immigrants. Until then, we will work to help immigrants who are eligible for legal status but can't afford a lawyer and/or whose fundamental legal rights have been trampled upon.

This may be the civil rights battle of our times. AI Justice regularly sees deserving immigrants who have nowhere else to turn for help: traumatized children alone in this country, people trafficked into slavery, asylum seekers who would face persecution in their homelands, and other vulnerable immigrants who cannot afford or find an attorney. Despite a relatively small budget – \$3.2 million annually – we achieve enormous impact protecting the human and legal rights of thousands of immigrants and working with our local, state and federal governments. We also partner with some of the most prominent advocacy groups in the nation to stretch our reach. AI Justice is the rare organization that works both on the frontline of human rights—in our own backyard—and nationwide. At AI Justice any support goes a long, long way.

**Q:** Aren't all AI Justice clients illegal immigrants?

**A:** AI Justice carefully screens our clients. We don't take a case unless we believe the person is eligible for immigration relief and/or their human rights have been seriously violated. In many cases, we obtain legal status for clients who were initially denied relief.

**Q:** Can I get a copy of your audited financial statement?

**A:** Yes, of course. We have had a clean audit for each of our fifteen years.

**Q:** Aren't you concerned about illegal immigrants taking American jobs, using our services without paying taxes and costing Americans taxpayers money?

**A:** About 38 million immigrants live in this country. Of those, an estimated 7 million unauthorized immigrants are in the workforce. About two-thirds of them pay Social Security taxes, FICA, etc. – basically all the payroll taxes that any worker pays. Yet these unauthorized workers are not entitled to any of the benefits. In fact, these workers now provide a subsidy of about \$7 billion a year, which bolsters the long-term finances of our Social Security funds.

We also know that American immigrants – regardless of status – have a substantial overall positive impact on our economy. They have boosted our economy and given the U.S. a significant competitive advantage over other developed countries whose aging populations no longer have a young workforce to pay for the social services older citizens will need. As conservative economist and former Federal Reserve Chair Alan Greenspan said in his testimony before Congress in April 2009:

*There is little doubt that unauthorized, that is, illegal, immigration has made a significant contribution to the growth of our economy. Unauthorized immigrants serve*

*as a flexible component of our workforce, often a safety valve when demand is pressing and among the first to be discharged when the economy falters.*

It's also important to note that unauthorized workers are essential in a number of industries, including agriculture. As long as they lack papers, they are easy prey for unscrupulous employers who abuse them. If somehow the workers were to go away, the jobs will go away, too: we will be exporting jobs and importing food from Mexico and China. The sensible solution is to allow these workers to earn citizenship through a stringent but fair legalization process. Meanwhile, Americans should not be party to wholesale violations of the basic human rights of anyone on our soil.