

2026

Mid-Year Impact Snapshot



The first half of 2026 has brought continued instability for immigrant communities across the country. Expanding detention, rapidly shifting enforcement policies, and growing barriers to asylum and other humanitarian protections have left many individuals and families navigating profound uncertainty, often with little access to support or due process.

In response, the American Immigration Council continues working across multiple fronts at once: defending individuals facing immediate harm, helping communities build stronger systems of inclusion and support, equipping leaders with credible research and tools, and advancing practical solutions rooted in fairness, accountability, and belonging. The stories and updates below offer a snapshot of our work in action – and of the tangible impact it is having for individuals, families, and communities nationwide.

OUR VISION

We envision a nation where immigrants are embraced, communities are enriched, and justice prevails for all. We strive to create a society that values immigrants as vital contributors to our nation and where everyone is afforded an equal opportunity to thrive socially, economically, and culturally.

OUR MISSION

The Council strives to strengthen the United States by shaping immigration policies and practices through innovative programs, cutting-edge research, and strategic legal and advocacy efforts grounded in evidence, compassion, justice and fairness. We collaborate with diverse stakeholders, including policymakers, grassroots organizations, and immigrant communities, to advance results-driven solutions to the challenges facing immigrants and communities throughout the United States.

LEGAL VICTORY: COURT PROTECTS PUBLIC SERVICE LOAN FORGIVENESS

This month, the Council and its co-plaintiffs secured a major legal victory when a federal judge [struck down](#) the Department of Education's proposed rule that would have allowed the government to deny Public Service Loan Forgiveness to people who work for organizations that help underserved communities, including immigrants and their families. The [ruling](#) protects congressionally authorized benefits for nonprofit employees, safeguards organizations' ability to recruit and retain public servants, and ensures that mission-driven organizations cannot be penalized for the communities they serve.

Defending LGBTQ+ Iranian Asylum Seekers Facing Imminent Return to Persecution

When three LGBTQ+ Iranians arrived together at the U.S. southern border seeking asylum, they believed they had finally reached safety. All three had fled severe persecution in Iran tied to their sexual orientation or gender identity, including abuse within deeply conservative families, harassment, and detention by morality police. Two had been arrested, imprisoned, and threatened with execution. After escaping Iran, they traveled together across multiple countries before arriving in the United States to seek protection.

Instead, all three were placed into immigration detention, where they remained separated from each other, and, for long periods, meaningful access to counsel. Their cases were deeply intertwined. They were witnesses to one another's persecution and carried overlapping evidence of the harms they had survived.

Yet despite the striking similarities in their claims, their outcomes initially diverged dramatically.

One client, represented through the Council's Immigration Justice Campaign (IJC), secured asylum following a successful hearing and was released from detention. After years spent fleeing persecution and instability, he was finally able to begin rebuilding his life in safety. He now has the option to pursue work aligned with his previous profession in healthcare. What changed the trajectory of his case was not the severity of the persecution he faced — it was access to legal representation capable of navigating an extraordinarily complex immigration system.

The other two individuals, a couple, were not represented during their initial immigration proceedings.

Without counsel, both men were forced to navigate asylum hearings while detained, traumatized, and unable to meaningfully access the evidence required to support their claims. They were expected to gather foreign records, secure certified translations, prepare legal filings in English, and respond to complicated legal questions regarding prior residence in third countries, all while detained and without legal guidance. Immigration judges rejected key testimony and prevented the men from presenting corroborating witnesses, even though they had firsthand knowledge of one another's persecution. Review of hearing recordings later revealed deeply troubling conduct, including disparaging comments regarding one client's sexual orientation and repeated misstatements of the applicable legal standard.





NEW RESOURCE: RESTORING CREDIBILITY AND HUMANITY TO IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT

This spring, the Council released [Restoring Credibility and Humanity: A New Framework for Immigration Enforcement](#), a new, comprehensive policy framework outlining practical recommendations to restore accountability, proportionality, and public trust in the immigration system. By pairing legal analysis with actionable reforms, the publication equips policymakers, advocates, and community leaders with a roadmap for advancing a more effective, humane, and credible approach to immigration enforcement.

As two of these clients remained in detention, the stakes escalated further. The United States resumed deportation flights to Iran, placing both individuals at imminent risk of removal to a country where same-sex relationships remain criminalized and punishable by severe violence, imprisonment, and execution. At various points, both clients came within days — and in some cases hours — of deportation.

One client, whose health significantly deteriorated while detained, lost substantial weight and struggled to walk without assistance. The other repeatedly called his attorneys terrified that he and his partner would be placed onto deportation flights back to Iran. Both men feared the prospect of permanent separation from one another after years spent surviving persecution together, or possibly even their execution.

In response, the Council worked alongside the National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC) and other partners to prevent their removal. Through a combination of habeas litigation, appellate advocacy, emergency motions practice, and rapid-response coordination, the legal teams secured critical protections for both men. One client ultimately obtained a stay from the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals preventing his deportation, while another later secured release from detention after the government declined to oppose habeas relief.

These interventions did more than halt deportations. They prevented LGBTQ+ asylum seekers from being returned to a country where they faced extreme harm, including possible execution. They reunited this family and offered the possibility of safety, stability, and dignity after years of trauma and prolonged detention. At the same time, the cases exposed the profound disparities that continue to shape asylum outcomes in the United States. While one client secured protection after receiving legal counsel early in the process, the other two spent more than a year detained and fighting to reopen deeply flawed proceedings conducted without representation.

Together, these cases underscore the life-or-death importance of access to counsel for asylum seekers navigating detention and removal proceedings. They also demonstrate the essential role that coordinated legal advocacy continues to play in safeguarding due process and ensuring vulnerable individuals are not forced to face the immigration system alone.

FIELD BUILDING: UNLOCKING BELONGING SUMMIT STRENGTHENS A GROWING FIELD

The [Center for Inclusion and Belonging](#) (CIB) co-hosted Unlocking Belonging: A Summit on Measurement, Insights, and Action, convening leaders in belonging evaluation alongside early innovators of the Belonging Barometer to explore how belonging can be more effectively measured, understood, and advanced. By strengthening connections across the field and fostering shared approaches to evaluation and practice, the summit helped build the infrastructure needed to advance evidence-based belonging efforts nationwide.



Protecting Due Process in the Nation's Largest Immigration Detention System

Routine traffic stops changed the lives of Ignacio Sosnava Rodriguez, Alejandro Villegas Angel, and Miguel Angel Gomez Alvarado. All three had lived in the United States for well over a decade; they are fathers of U.S. citizen children, have no criminal histories, and have strong legal claims to remain in the country based on the hardship their removal would cause their families. Yet after immigration authorities took them into custody in late 2025 and early 2026, each spent months in detention without any opportunity to ask a judge whether continued detention was necessary. Instead, they remained separated from their families while their immigration cases moved forward.

Their experiences reflected a profound shift in federal immigration policy. Although mandatory detention has long existed in limited circumstances, the Trump administration significantly expanded its application in 2025, arguing that people who had entered the country without inspection, including longtime residents like Ignacio, Alejandro, and Miguel, could remain in detention for months without ever receiving an individualized bond hearing. In practice, that meant the government could deprive people of their liberty without demonstrating that they posed a danger to the community or a risk of flight.

After these three men filed habeas petitions, the district courts in each of their cases found that detaining them without an individualized bond hearing violated the Fifth Amendment's guarantee of due process and ordered their release. When the government appealed those decisions, the Council, along with partners at the National Immigration Project, recognized the profound constitutional implications and stepped up alongside to defend the rulings before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, where the Council argued before a panel of appellate judges.

This July, [a Fifth Circuit panel affirmed](#) the district courts' decisions, concluding that individuals detained under the administration's expanded mandatory detention policy are entitled to a bond hearing within 90 days, where the government must provide an individualized justification for continued detention.

Unfortunately, just one week later, the Fifth Circuit unilaterally granted rehearing en banc to challenge this victory, vacating the panel decision. Briefing to the en banc court will likely be completed in September. The litigation remains one of the Council's most significant constitutional challenges to the administration's expanded detention policy. As this litigation proceeds, the stakes extend well beyond the three fathers whose cases gave rise to

LEGAL VICTORY: PRELIMINARY INJUNCTION PROTECTS THE IMMIGRATION APPEALS PROCESS

The Council and its partners secured a preliminary injunction in litigation challenging actions that threatened the integrity of the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA), the nation's highest administrative body for interpreting and applying immigration law. The ruling helps preserve critical procedural safeguards while the case proceeds, helping protect due process and ensuring immigrants continue to receive fair and independent review of their appeals.

our work. The Fifth Circuit encompasses Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi, home to the nation's largest immigration detention system. As of spring 2026, Texas and Louisiana alone held more than 26,000 people in ICE detention, underscoring the outsized implications of the legal questions now before the full court.

For Ignacio, Alejandro, and Miguel, litigation secured their release through favorable district court rulings, allowing them to return home to their families while continuing to pursue their immigration cases. For tens of thousands of others, the Council will continue to defend a critical constitutional safeguard against prolonged detention without meaningful judicial review.

But in October, ICE began implementing a policy that violated that court order and once again detained young people as they turned 18. We immediately filed an emergency motion to halt this practice. The court ruled in our favor, issuing a temporary restraining order and requiring ICE to release the 18-year-olds it had detained, rescind all related detention decisions, and disclose its internal policies for review.

This victory reinforces a simple but critical truth: immigrant youth—many fleeing violence or abandonment—deserve protection, not punishment. The Council will continue to hold our government accountable to ensure no young person is unlawfully detained again.

From Siloed Reactions to Regional Impact: West Michigan and Gateways for Growth

Ten years ago, welcoming work for immigrants and refugees in Kent County and across West Michigan was largely reactive and fragmented. Immigrant leaders, community advocates, and local nonprofits laid important groundwork to support newcomers seeking to learn English, navigate schools, access public services, recREDENTIAL in their professions, or start businesses. However, this work was underfunded and siloed, with no shared regional strategy, coordinated framework, and dedicated full-time infrastructure focused on advancing immigrant inclusion across sectors.

Today, that landscape has shifted. A formal welcoming plan guides the region's efforts, and four staff coordinate implementation across seven multi-sector working groups involving 65 partner organizations. More than half of those groups include representation from six or more sectors — government, business, education, nonprofits, and immigrant-led organizations — reflecting a deliberate move from isolated initiatives to sustained collaboration. What was once fragmented has become a coordinated, region-wide ecosystem for belonging.



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This transformation was locally led and catalyzed through the region's participation in the Council's Gateways for Growth Challenge (G4G) initiative, a competitive program run in partnership with Welcoming America to help local communities be more inclusive. Through G4G, the Council conducted a comprehensive analysis of the region's immigrant population and provided hands-on technical assistance to translate data and community input into a strategic welcoming plan. [The findings](#) validated immigrants' substantial economic contributions, while also revealing critical gaps. By centering immigrant voices alongside quantitative data, G4G also helped reframe welcoming work as a long-term investment in belonging.

With Council guidance, these insights were translated into the [Welcoming Kent County Plan](#), published in 2020. Although the COVID-19 pandemic delayed implementation, the plan provided a durable framework. When a Welcome Plan Coordinator joined in 2022, partners moved quickly to action.

Early wins — such as coordinated community safety dialogues between immigrant residents and law enforcement — demonstrated the model's effectiveness. That momentum, paired with continued use of localized data, helped secure state funding to expand the work regionally, resulting in the [West Michigan Welcoming Plan](#).

The region's capacity has fundamentally changed. The taskforce has grown from 37 to 65 members, grassroots and immigrant-led organizations now have a sustained seat at the table, and cross-sector collaboration has become the norm rather than the exception. What began as disconnected responses has evolved into a durable, regionwide infrastructure for inclusion — one seeded by Gateways for Growth and built for lasting impact.

Equipping Communities with Credible, Actionable Insights

At a moment when immigration policy is changing rapidly and public understanding is often shaped by misinformation, access to reliable data has never been more important. Yet for years, much of the federal government's immigration data remained difficult to access and interpret, scattered across more than 1,700 spreadsheets and PDF reports. While the information was technically public, it was often inaccessible to the policymakers, researchers, advocates, journalists, and community leaders who needed it to understand how the immigration system was functioning and how changes in policy were affecting immigrant communities.

This spring, the Council launched its new [USCIS Data Dashboard](#) to change that.

By bringing years of federal immigration data into a single, publicly accessible platform, the dashboard enables users to quickly identify trends in immigration filings, adjudications, processing times, and agency backlogs. More importantly, it gives decision makers the tools they need to understand how those trends affect real people and communities.

The dashboard's impact was immediate. Congressional staff relied on the tool to brief policymakers on developments within the immigration system, helping ensure that public officials had access to timely and accurate information during a period of significant policy change. Researchers, policy experts, advocates, and journalists likewise turned to the dashboard as a resource to better understand emerging trends and assess the practical implications of administrative decisions.

By consolidating years of federal immigration data into a single platform, the dashboard enables users to identify patterns that were previously difficult to detect. Rather than piecing together hundreds of disparate datasets, they can quickly understand how changes in agency operations affect processing times, application volumes, and case backlogs across the immigration system. In just one example, users were able to track how fluctuations in agency capacity corresponded with growing application backlogs, helping illuminate the causes and consequences of processing delays that affect immigrants, families, and employers nationwide.

Those insights are already informing decision-making; following its release, state and local leaders working directly with immigrant communities highlighted the tool's value in identifying barriers facing residents and understanding community needs. For these stakeholders, access to clear and timely information helps inform planning, outreach, service delivery, and advocacy efforts that directly affect immigrant families.

The dashboard has also supported direct legal advocacy. Attorneys challenging delays in immigration adjudications have used its data in litigation, including in a recent case involving a client's pending Employment Authorization Document (EAD) application, demonstrating the value of accessible, credible data in advancing accountability and timely decision-making.

As awareness of the dashboard spread, its findings informed reporting by national, local, and international media outlets, expanding public access to trustworthy information about the immigration system. Researchers, journalists, policymakers, and community leaders have used the tool to move beyond anecdotes and engage with immigration issues through evidence and transparency.

Behind every chart, data point, and trend are real people: families awaiting immigration decisions, workers seeking stability, employers navigating workforce needs, and communities striving to ensure that all residents have the opportunity to thrive. By transforming complex government data into actionable insight, the Council is helping ensure that the conversations and decisions shaping immigrants' lives are grounded in facts, informed by evidence, and responsive to the realities communities face every day.