

**COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
TUESDAY, APRIL 21, 2026**

MINUTE ORDER NO. 16

SUBJECT: EXPANDING IMMIGRANT LEGAL DEFENSE AND KNOW YOUR RIGHTS RESOURCES THROUGH A PARTNERSHIP WITH THE MEXICAN CONSULATE (DISTRICTS: ALL)

OVERVIEW

As federal immigration enforcement expands, more San Diego families are being pulled into detention and removal proceedings without legal representation. Unlike criminal defendants, individuals facing immigration removal proceedings have no constitutional right to appointed counsel. Without an attorney, even individuals with strong legal claims are routinely removed without ever having a chance to make their case.

Everyone deserves due process and a fair day in court. Since 2022, the County of San Diego's Immigrant Legal Defense Program (ILDP) has made that principle real: nearly two-thirds of ILDP clients whose cases reached a decision were granted relief by a judge, compared to just 5% of those without legal representation. The ILDP is administered through the County's Office of the Public Defender, which provides legal representation to individuals facing removal proceedings who cannot afford private counsel. The program has proven cost-effective, with legal costs nearly 80% less than hiring a private attorney.

Aggressive mass deportation sweeps are tearing local families apart, destabilizing neighborhoods, and eroding trust in government. These operations undermine due process and swiftly remove people from their homes and communities. Without an attorney, even individuals with strong legal claims are far less likely to succeed. The impacts are immediate and long-lasting: kids left without parents, workers ripped from jobs, and families forced into crisis overnight.

Mixed-status and binational families are bearing the brunt of this enforcement wave. San Diego County is home to at least 200,000 Mexican nationals, nearly half of whom are estimated to have uncertain or unresolved documentation status and may face heightened risk of detention and family separation-and with enforcement expanding and demand growing, new resources are needed to meet the moment. That concentration of need makes the Consulate General of Mexico in San Diego (Mexican Consulate) a natural partner in expanding the County's response.

Today's action directs and authorizes County staff to negotiate and execute two Memoranda of Agreement with the Mexican Consulate, providing additional information and legal resources, covering at least a two-year period:

- **Know Your Rights Resources:** Families need accurate information about their rights-and they need it before an enforcement event occurs. The Mexican Consulate already provides essential resources and services toward that end: helping families make contingency plans for their children in the event of detention or deportation, so that U.S.-born children don't unnecessarily enter the foster care system, and providing emergency assistance and family

reunification support. County facilities-libraries, health clinics, social services offices-are trusted spaces where residents already go for help, making them ideal channels for extending the reach of Know Your Rights materials to the families who need them most.

- Investments in the ILDP to Offset County Costs: The Mexican Consulate has expressed interest in co-investing in legal defense for individuals facing removal proceedings, making it a natural partner for the ILDP. Mexican nationals represent approximately 24% of individuals in the ILDP's existing client database, making this partnership directly relevant to the program's current caseload. Consular funding would expand access to post-arrest interventions-including bond assistance, habeas corpus motions, and vacatur motions-that are essential in preventing prolonged detention, correcting prior convictions that carry unwarranted immigration consequences, and ensuring due process for individuals navigating complex immigration proceedings.

These two MOAs reflect the County's commitment to ensuring that every family in San Diego has access to both the information and the legal support they need to defend their rights.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

CHAIR TERRA LAWSON-REMER AND CHAIR PRO TEM PALOMA AGUIRRE

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to enter into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Mexican Consulate to increase access to Know Your Rights Material at County facilities for the general public.
2. Approve and authorize the Public Defender to execute a revenue agreement to accept funds from the Mexican Consulate for the purposes of providing legal services to Mexican nationals, including but not limited to: Bond Assistance, Habeas Motions and Vacatur Motions.
3. Authorize the Public Defender to execute any extensions, amendments, or revisions thereto, that do not materially impact either the program or funding level.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Every San Diegan deserves clear access to information about their rights and the government resources available to them. Today's action distributes educational materials designed to reduce the financial and time barriers that too often prevent members of our community from getting the support they need.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

When families have access to legal counsel and accurate information about their rights, they are better able to remain stably housed, employed, and connected to the social services they rely on. Family separation and sudden deportation create cascading instability-pushing children into foster care, destabilizing household finances, and increasing demand on County safety-net programs. By expanding legal defense capacity and distributing Know Your Rights resources through trusted County facilities, today's action strengthens the resilience of mixed-status families and the communities that depend on them. A community where residents can access due process and plan for uncertainty is a more stable, resilient community for everyone.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with this board letter. The Mexican Consulate will take on the sole expense of preparing, printing, and delivering the materials to the County and any expenses related to immigration services for Mexican Nationals. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ACTION:

ON MOTION of Supervisor Lawson-Remer, seconded by Supervisor Aguirre, the Board of Supervisors took action as recommended.

AYES: Aguirre, Lawson-Remer, Montgomery Steppe

NOES: Anderson, Desmond

State of California)
County of San Diego) §

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a full, true and correct copy of the Original entered in the Minutes of the Board of Supervisors.

ANDREW POTTER
Clerk of the Board of Supervisors



Signed
by Andrew Potter