



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

1600 PACIFIC HIGHWAY, ROOM 335, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA 92101-2470

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: April 21, 2026

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TO: Board of Supervisors

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

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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)

SUPERVISOR TERRA LAWSON-REMER AND SUPERVISOR 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

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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

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

The County of San Diego (County) has long been at the forefront of supporting immigrant communities through policies and programs that promote due process, public safety, and family stability. In recent years, the County has made significant investments in the Immigrant Legal Defense Program (ILDP), which provides legal representation and services to individuals facing immigration proceedings. These efforts recognize that access to legal counsel is one of the most critical factors in ensuring fair outcomes in immigration court and in preventing unnecessary family separation.

At the same time, federal immigration enforcement practices have continued to evolve, often resulting in increased detentions, expedited removals, and heightened fear within immigrant communities. These conditions have created an urgent need for expanded access to accurate information, culturally competent services, and legal resources that can respond quickly at the moment of detention or legal crisis.

The Consulate General of Mexico in San Diego (Mexican Consulate) has been a longstanding and trusted partner in serving Mexican nationals throughout the region. The Mexican Consulate provides critical services including legal orientation, documentation support, emergency assistance, and family preparedness planning. These services are often the first point of contact for

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individuals navigating complex immigration challenges and play a key role in stabilizing families during times of uncertainty.

Despite these efforts, gaps remain in ensuring that individuals can seamlessly access both trusted information and timely legal intervention. Many residents interact with County systems such as behavioral health centers, libraries, and community centers yet may not be aware of available consular resources or their legal rights. Additionally, while the ILDP provides essential legal services, demand continues to exceed available resources, particularly for individuals requiring immediate post-detention legal support such as bond representation or post-conviction relief.

Formalizing a partnership with the Consulate through two Memoranda of Agreement will build on existing collaboration and address these gaps. The first Memorandum will focus on expanding access to Know Your Rights information and consular resources at County facilities. The second Memorandum will establish a framework for the Consulate to provide financial support to the ILDP, administered through the Office of the Public Defender, to enhance legal services for Mexican nationals, including bond assistance, habeas corpus petitions, and vacatur motions. The Mexican Consulate will provide an application for the funds to be completed by the attorneys representing Mexican nationals per the ILDP. An average bond amount for an immigration case is \$2,000. An average Habeas Corpus Motion in Federal Court cost \$3,500. An average vacatur motion cost \$5,000.

By strengthening coordination between the County and the Mexican Consulate, this initiative advances the County's commitment to equitable access to services, supports effective legal representation, and reinforces a regional approach to protecting immigrant families.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

The County's continued commitment to ensuring easy access to information and government resources advances the County of San Diego's 2026–2031 Strategic Plan goal of delivering public services that strengthen Live Well San Diego, creating a community where every San Diegan feels supported in accessing the information and resources they need.

Respectfully submitted,



TERRA LAWSON-REMER
Supervisor, Third District



PALOMA AGUIRRE
Supervisor, First District

ATTACHMENT(S)

N/A