



*City of Alexandria, Virginia*  
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Alyia Gaskins  
Mayor

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April 18, 2025

Evaluation Committee  
Safety and Fairness for Everyone (SAFE) Network  
Vera Institute of Justice  
Via online submission

Dear Evaluators:

Thank you for your attention to our letter of support. As Mayor of the City of Alexandria, Virginia, I write with a resounding endorsement of the Immigrant Justice Program at the Legal Aid Justice Center and their application to the Vera Institute of Justice for Safety and Fairness for Everyone (SAFE) Network for membership and catalyst funding.

Headquartered in Northern Virginia, the Immigrant Justice Program (IJP) at the Legal Aid Justice Center (LAJC) is a longtime partner in providing critical legal counsel and resources to immigrant families and service providers in Alexandria, including deportation defense for individual clients. LAJC is a strong and effective organization and a key resource as we seek to extend protection to our most vulnerable communities. I am pleased to affirm that we are increasing our budget allocation in next year's budget for their deportation defense and wide-ranging services in an amount of more than \$100,000.

The City of Alexandria has a large non-native-born population comprising more than 20% of the City's population. These include residents from countries worldwide who face the threat of deportation, most of whom are likely natives of Central America, South America and the Caribbean. As of 2020, we estimated that there are over 20% foreign-born Alexandrians undocumented in the City. This number includes a sizable Temporary Protected Status (TPS) population. These persons are of all ages, including Deferred Action for Children (DACA) Arrivals youth and young adults who have spent most of their lives living in the United States. As an example of the diversity in our community, the number of languages spoken in households of our students who attend Alexandria City Public Schools exceeds 119.

In 2020, the Office of Human Rights of the City of Alexandria selected LAJC to receive a grant for a pilot program to provide free legal services to our immigrant residents. This grant was awarded through a competitive process to fund a legal representation program to support Alexandria residents facing deportation and increase their chances of success in Federal Court and remaining in the United States legally. With approval from the Alexandria City Council to allocate funds in our Fiscal Year 2020 budget, we solicited proposals from nonprofit legal service providers interested in partnering with the City of Alexandria to ensure due process rights of immigrant community members and provide legal consultation and representation related to immigration proceedings. LAJC was in the first rank of providers.

Over the past five years, LAJC has played a critical role in serving Latinx immigrants in Alexandria, including those who are undocumented. We rely on LAJC to apply their legal expertise to help families protect themselves against the urgent threats of detention, deportation, and family separation. LAJC provides legal consultations, legal representation, and immigrant rights education to low-income immigrants. Through consultations, LAJC screens individuals for potential immigration relief, advises on immigration matters, and, where appropriate, provides additional legal assistance or makes targeted referrals. Through education



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and legal representation, LAJC helps ensure that immigration families can stay together and flourish amid a national political climate hostile to immigrants. In particular, LAJC helps individuals obtain release on bond from immigration detention; represents victims of unlawful ICE raids; works with families to create ICE raid safety plans and execute Powers of Attorney; and advocates for individuals facing imminent deportation. Through Know Your Rights (KYR) presentations, LAJC has educated hundreds of community members and service providers on the most pressing issues in the immigrant community, including how to prepare for and respond to ICE raids.

The current changes to longstanding immigration policies and threat of mass deportations have created considerable fear and confusion among immigrant communities. LAJC is countering these fears with an increased number of KYR sessions around immigration issues for both immigrants and service providers, family preparedness clinics, an immigration rapid response toolkit and hotline, resources, and emergency planning guide to help people prepare for immigration emergencies such as raids, ICE visits, detention, or risk of deportation. LAJC has helped ensure that Alexandria residents can be with their families, rather than in immigration detention, as they pursue immigration relief, thereby preventing family separation, loss of income, and the many other downstream effects of detention. LAJC's work thus not only benefits immigrant residents but also the City of Alexandria as a whole.

With its significant success defending immigrant rights, LAJC has gained the trust of the immigrant community in Northern Virginia and has forged deep connections with those who serve immigrants. The City of Alexandria has thus seen fit to increase its current level of investment in LAJC's legal services for immigrants by more than \$100,000 in next year's budget cycle (July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026). I deeply value and support the work of LAJC, and fully support their application.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you need more information. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alyia Gaskins".

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