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The Ascend Justice Newsletter • August 2025



Ascend Justice serves clients who have traveled thousands of miles and left dangerous, abusive situations to reach safety. In recent months, the sense of safety has been dramatically diminished, even when immigrants do everything right. With a series of federal policy changes, the Trump administration is effectively dismantling legal immigration and eroding due process rights.

Perhaps the most alarming development, immigration judges are dismissing cases abruptly, while ICE officers wait to arrest immigrants the moment they leave court. "People are afraid to go to court," our Director of Immigration, Christina Verdirame, explained. "You're trying to go to court to exercise your due process rights, to follow the rules, to meet the conditions of your release in some cases, but also just to follow through on your asylum case, follow through on whatever case you have, and people are essentially being penalized for that, which is infringing on due process."

Temporary Protected Status (TPS)—a special designation for people who come from places in political or social turmoil, which the State Department deems as hostile or dangerous to the people who have left—is also being revoked for many. Some of the revoked TPS programs have been in place since the 90s, leaving long-term residents scrambling after rebuilding their lives here.

Expedited removal is also expanding under Trump. ICE is now using expedited removal justifications against people who were previously protected for humanitarian or public benefit reasons, and placing people in detention without bond or access to attorneys or the court system—a clear violation of due process rights. Senior Attorney for Immigration, Matt McGuire, explained: “The government is starting to make very creative arguments on their authority to apply expedited removal without access to the immigration court system, in violation of people’s due process.”

Our immigration attorneys are also concerned about the erosion of prosecutorial discretion for pending immigration applications, or what’s called “deferred action.” Courts no longer seem willing to hold off on deportation when an individual has a pending application for Violence Against Women Act Self-Petitions, U-Visas (for victims of crime), Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, or other types of humanitarian relief. Angelica Gonzalez-Lopez, our Managing Director for Immigration and Client Services, explained the problem: “Even the clients who have deferred action and a work permit are not guaranteed they won’t be processed by ICE or that they won’t be ordered deported by a judge, even though technically they have lawful authority to be in the US. They have work authorization and they’re allowed to be here and to work, but they don’t have an actual status, and so that puts them in this category where ICE has the discretion to say, ‘We’re just going to ignore that, or we’re going to revoke that, or we just don’t really care because that’s not an actual approved visa, or a person who has a lawful permanent residency.’”

This is a nerve-wracking time for many of our clients. People who have lived in the US for decades, people who thought they had found safety in asylum, people who thought they were free from abuse, are suddenly fearful again. As these changes continue to sow fear and chaos among our immigrant neighbors, it’s likely that they will become even more reluctant to come forward and seek help when they’ve been abused. Moreover, the erosion of due process rights is likely to have an impact beyond immigrant communities, shifting norms and policies so that we all risk losing the freedoms and protections we seem to be taking for granted.

We have a clear message for our clients and our community. In the face of intimidation and coercion, Ascend Justice remains steadfast in our commitment to the rule of law. Despite its historic gaps, the rule of law is a core reason that our country has drawn newcomers and immigrants for centuries. We will all be diminished without it, and without them.



Recruitment is Open for the Ascend Justice Young Professionals Board

Calling all professionals under 40 who want to do good, gain skills, network, and have fun! Our Young Professionals Board (YPB) is actively seeking new members to help us broaden the reach of Ascend Justice through fundraising, social networking, and advocacy.

Learn more and apply:

<https://www.ascendjustice.org/young-professionals-board/>

Ascend Justice Out and About

July 31 through August 3 was Lollapalooza, and this year, one of our lucky raffle winners got to attend VIP! Mike Mellul (RSM, pictured right with his +1) had a blast over the 4-day music festival, made possible by PS Business Management LLC.

On August 13, Ascend Justice [Leadership Circle](#) members attended the annual Broadway in Chicago concert together at the Jay Pritzker Pavilion in Millennium Park.

And on August 14, Ascend Justice attorneys, staff, and YPB members joined other Chicago area legal service organizations for the annual Race Judicata, a 5K in support of the Chicago Volunteer Legal Services Foundation.



We Asked, You Answered

We are absolutely blown away by the quick response of our community in our clients' time of need! Earlier this month, we sent out a call for school supplies because some of our clients' kids needed backpacks, pencils, notebooks, and other school essentials, and you all responded *fast!* In a single day, our amazing community (YOU!) purchased our entire school supply wishlist on Amazon, and we started receiving supplies almost immediately.

From the bottom of our hearts, thank you for responding so quickly! Lots of Chicago kids are now much more ready for this first week of school than they would have been without you!

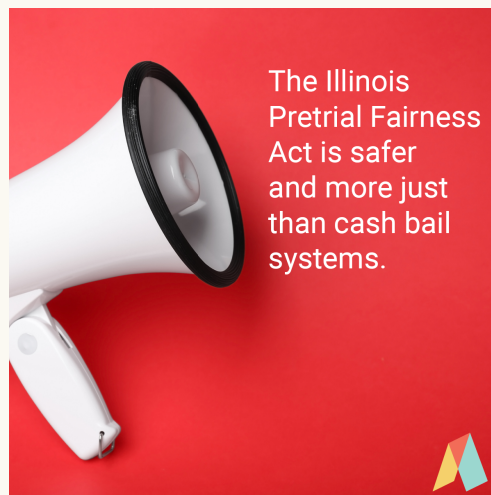
We've got everything we need for our back-to-school drive, but if you didn't get a chance to contribute and still want to, we are collecting Visa and Instacart gift cards, as well as baby supplies for our youngest clients, through [our regular Amazon wishlist](#).

We Support the Illinois Pretrial Fairness Act

The Illinois Pretrial Fairness Act (PFA) makes Illinois safer and more fair by eliminating cash bail and requiring pre-trial release for most misdemeanors and non-violent felonies. The PFA makes it so that our jails are no longer full of poor people awaiting trial for low-level offenses simply because they couldn't make bail.

Ascend Justice supports the Illinois Pretrial Fairness Act because it makes pre-release

decisions about facts, now how much money you have. To learn more about how the PFA impacts Illinois, see [Loyola's Center for Criminal Justice](#).



Sign up to save the date!

Mark Your Calendars: October 7

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month (DVAM), and this year, Ascend Justice is planning a joint community outreach event with two of our community partners: The Network and the Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation (CAASE).

We are asking all of our supporters and everyone who cares about gender-based violence to mark your calendars and plan to show up (wearing purple, or your [Ascend Justice t-shirt](#)) to Daley Plaza on Tuesday, October 7, from noon to 1pm. Ascend Justice will be speaking about the strength of community and the importance of collaboration between Chicago's anti-gender-based violence organizations. And we will be letting survivors know **You Are Not Alone!**

Our goal is to pack the plaza, so please plan to spend your lunch hour with us on October 7!

Making a Difference for Incarcerated Survivors at Logan Correctional Center

Attorneys from our Incarcerated Survivors Program (ISP) and Economic Justice practice areas visited Logan Correctional Center last month, along with several interns from both Ascend Justice and our community partner, the [Women's Justice Institute](#). While at Logan, our attorneys met with existing clients and conducted intakes with many new clients. Senior Attorney for Economic Justice, Elizabeth Yoo, and recent ISP fellow, Nia Crosley, taught a class about economic justice. ISP staff attorney, Mary Kate Winn, taught four classes about the [Gender-Based Violence Resentencing Act](#), with over 80 incarcerated individuals attending in total.



When the ISP and Economic Justice teams weren't at the prison, they explored the town of Lincoln, getting to see the world's largest covered wagon, as well as a watermelon monument that commemorates the naming of the town.



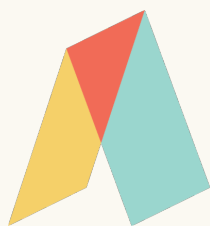
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