

# [***Migrants Convicted of Violent Crimes Get Free Lawyer Under California Bill***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BHT-XNF1-DY68-117S-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** A California bill would remove restrictions on grant money for legal services going to immigrants convicted of a violent crime.

**Body**

A bill proposed to California's state legislature would allow grant money to be provided to migrants convicted of violent crimes.

California Assemblymember Reginald Jones-Sawyer, a Los Angeles Democrat, introduced legislation in February that would amend the state's One California program, which provides grants to nonprofits and programs providing legal services for immigrants who otherwise may struggle to afford to do so.

The proposed changes to the program come as immigration remains a major sticking point in national ***politics*** amid a rise in asylum seekers crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. There were more than 2.4 million encounters at the U.S.-Mexico border during the 2023 fiscal year, up from roughly 1.7 million in 2021, according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection data.

Republicans have pushed for more stringent border protections aimed at limiting the number of migrants able to enter the U.S., while [*Democrats*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/democrats?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) have said the country has an obligation to hear asylum seeker cases, largely supporting more protections for immigrants.

Jones-Sawyer's bill, if it becomes law, would make a number of changes to how this grant money could be spent. One change proposed in the bill is that it would no longer be restricted from migrants who have been convicted of a violent crime, the bill's text reads.

"Existing law prohibits use of the grant funds to provide legal services to an individual who has been convicted of, or who is currently appealing a conviction for, a violent or serious felony. This bill would remove that prohibition on the use of funds for those individuals," the bill reads.

Notably, some studies have suggested immigrants are less likely to commit crimes than natural-born U.S. citizens. A [*Stanford University*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/stanford-university?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) study published in July 2023 found that immigrants are 60 percent less likely to become incarcerated for committing crimes than natural-born U.S. citizens.

The bill would also make changes to criteria for organizations providing legal services to undocumented minors and expand qualifying services "having an intent to reside in and having a nexus to the state" to include services for removal defense.

The bill sparked criticism from some conservatives on X, the social media platform formerly known as [*Twitter*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/twitter?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), after it was shared by the prominent account @EndWokeness. The post was viewed more than 10 million times by Monday afternoon.

"When is enough enough?" wrote [*Elon Musk*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/elon-musk?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), the founder of [*Tesla*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/tesla?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) and CEO of X.

"I honestly think these insane liberal lunatics just play games to see how far they can go and how far they can push their mail-in voters," wrote conservative commentator [*Tomi Lahren*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/tomi-lahren?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships).

On the other hand, has received praise from immigration advocates.

In a press release released by Jones-Sawyer's office, California Immigrant Policy Center Executive Director Masih Fouladi praised the bill for ensuring "immigrant families have access to the legal services and resources they need to thrive with safety and stability – regardless of an individual's criminal history."

"Publicly funded immigration services protect the most vulnerable families in our state and improve the quality of life of all Californians," Fouladi wrote.

Camila Alvarez, legal director at Central American Resource Center

*Newsweek* reached out to Jones-Sawyer's office for comment via email.

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2360663/california-bill-migrants-convicted-grant-money.jpg)

**Graphic**

California bill migrants convicted grant money

Justin Sullivan/Justin Sullivan via Getty Images

The California State Capitol is seen in Sacramento on February 1, 2023. A new bill introduced in California would remove restrictions barring some grant money from providing legal services to migrants convicted of a violent crime.

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