

# Vera Institute of Justice

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

**<https://www.vera.org/publications/rising-to-the-moment-for-universal-representation>**

## Policy Issue Resources

### Publication

In 2017, the Vera Institute of Justice launched the Safety and Fairness for Everyone Network known as the SAFE Initiative or SAFE to counter the fundamental and urgent injustices facing immigrants caught up in the nation's immigration enforcement system. With roots in Vera's work for the past 15 years building the government-funded removal defense field, SAFE bridges local leadership and activism to bring about systemic change. A unique collaboration among governments, immigration legal service providers, and advocates, SAFE is building a movement for *universal representation* a public defender system for all immigrants facing deportation. Vera believes that every person facing deportation should be entitled to legal representation regardless of income, race, national origin, or history with the criminal legal system. This report highlights SAFE's achievements over just three years.

Although legal representation alone is not enough to undo decades of systemic injustices, it is clear that without counsel, many SAFE clients who have a right to remain in the United States would instead have been deported, separated from their families and homes, or forced to return to the very conditions from which they fled to seek protection.

Despite the devastating effects of detention and deportation and the complexity of immigration law, there is no right to appointed counsel in immigration court.

In the past 20 years, 93 percent of people granted relief from deportation have been represented, meaning it is nearly impossible to win in immigration court without an attorney.

SAFE advocates for a more equitable vision of justice to ensure that everyone has access to legal representation.

PUBLICATION

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