

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/rss-feed-gaining-momentum-the-new-york-immigrant-family-unity-project-expands-to-the-ulster-immigration-court>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Unlike in the criminal justice system, people in deportation proceedings do not have the right to counsel to assist in their legal defense. As of November 2015, however, 40 New Yorkers confronted with deportation proceedings at the Ulster Immigration Court in Napanoch, New York will no longer have to face a judge on their own. With funding from the New York State Assembly, the Ulster Immigration Court will be the latest site of the [New York Immigrant Family Unity Project \(NYIFUP\)](#), an innovative legal representation initiative that provides immigration defense attorneys to indigent people in deportation proceedings.

NYIFUP can make the difference between life and death. The outcome of an immigration case can determine whether someone facing persecution, torture, or death in their home country is able to remain in the United States. Not surprisingly, given the complexity of immigration law, [research shows](#) that represented immigrants fare as much as 1,000 percent better in immigration court than those who represent themselves. High-quality representation is essential to ensuring justice for people in immigration proceedings and for the families and communities that rely on them.

Representation at the Ulster Immigration Court will be provided by [Prisoners Legal Services of New York \(PLS\)](#), which has worked on behalf of people in New York State prisons for more than 40 years. PLS will represent clients through all stages of the administrative deportation process.

The pilot at the Ulster Immigration Court is the third NYIFUP site, joining another upstate New York pilot at the Batavia Immigration Court and the fully funded original NYIFUP site at the Varick Street Immigration Court. While the legal assistance offered at Ulster and Batavia will make an enormous difference to the immigrants who receive representation, current funding (\$200,000) meets only 10 percent of the need in the upstate New York immigration courts. The NYIFUP Coalition comprising the [Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant Rights](#), the [Center for Popular Democracy](#), [Make the Road New York](#), the [Immigration Justice Clinic of Cardozo Law School](#), and [Vera](#) continues to seek additional funds from New York State for full implementation of the project.

In piloting these initiatives across New York State, NYIFUP has created a replicable model for other jurisdictions. Advocates in cities across the country have contacted Vera and its partners for guidance on how to replicate NYIFUP in their communities. Already, a privately-funded universal representation program for indigent immigrants has been implemented in the immigration court in Elizabeth, NJ. Through its operations and a rigorous social science evaluation that will be released in 2017, NYIFUP seeks to foster universal representation for people in immigration detention nationwide.

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