

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/the-human-impact-of-universal-representation>

Policy Issue Resources

The [SAFE \(Safety and Fairness for Everyone\) Network](#) is a group of local jurisdictions, convened by the Vera Institute of Justice (Vera), dedicated to the goal of providing publicly funded legal representation for immigrants in their communities facing deportation. Local leaders in these jurisdictions are committed to keeping immigrant families together and communities safe by protecting due process for immigrants who cannot otherwise afford an attorney. The SAFE Network advances a [universal representation](#) model publicly funded deportation defense for all. The model's merits-blind case selection approach views all cases as equally deserving of representation, rooted in the widespread support for due process as a fundamental value of justice. What this translates to in real life is powerful.

This report presents a selection of clients stories that demonstrate the ripple effect of representation and importance of universal representation to clients, their families, and communities. The stories draw on interviews Vera researchers conducted with clients around the country. Many of these clients had been released from custody and were still awaiting final decisions on their cases at the time they were interviewed. Others had already won the right to remain legally in the United States. As their stories show, the involvement of lawyers brought fairness to complex immigration proceedings, helped restore trust in local institutions, and allowed clients to return to their communities and remain together with their families while they awaited the judges decision.

These stories were originally published in [A Year of Being SAFE](#), a report which describes the early successes of Vera's SAFE Network after the program's first year.

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