



**BROOKLYN  
DEFENDER  
SERVICES**



**ACLU  
SoCal**

January 3, 2019

**Contact:**

**For RAICES:** Joe Rivano Barros, [joe.rivanobarros@raicestexas.org](mailto:joe.rivanobarros@raicestexas.org), 510-798-0730

**For Brooklyn Defender Services:** Scott Hechinger, [shechinger@bds.org](mailto:shechinger@bds.org), 646-787-3300

**For ACLU SoCal:** ACLU SoCal Communications & Media Advocacy, [communications@aclusocal.org](mailto:communications@aclusocal.org), 213-977-5252

**For benny blanco:** Carla Sacks and Reid Kutrow at Sacks & Co., 212-741-1000; [carla@sacksco.com](mailto:carla@sacksco.com) and [reid.kutrow@sacksco.com](mailto:reid.kutrow@sacksco.com).

**\*\*\* FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE \*\*\***

**Launch of Immigrant Assistance Fund and Powerful New Music Video**

Today, Brooklyn Defender Services (BDS), RAICES, and ACLU of Southern California (ACLU SoCal) are announcing the launch of the “While They Wait” ([whiletheywait.org](http://whiletheywait.org)) campaign, which includes a new fund and call to action to help raise awareness and support for immigrants, particularly those seeking asylum and/or facing family separation. There are over 1 million immigrants, including 300,000 asylum seekers, currently living in the United States, who are going through the legal steps to gain immigration status. This campaign is being launched in tandem with the release of the new music video directed by Jake Schreier, for the song “I Found You / Nilda’s Story” by benny blanco, Calvin Harris, and Miguel.

The music video for “I Found You / Nilda’s Story,” tells the story of Nilda, a Honduran mother and Brooklyn Defender Services client, and her two-year-old son, Keyden. After fleeing domestic abuse and gang violence, the two were forcibly separated at the border, Nilda was held in five different detention centers, and they were only able to find each other after a lawsuit required the government to stop separating young children from their parents. They were apart for two months. Even though Keyden has been returned to his mother, she has no knowledge of what happened to him while they were apart.

Both Nilda and Keyden are seeking asylum but face the same struggle as hundreds of thousands of others in the same situation: They are unable to work without an official work authorization, which takes many months to obtain. They are also not guaranteed an attorney to help them navigate the complicated legal process ahead of them. While they wait, many immigrants like Nilda do not have enough food or money for rent. Even though some have family or friends to stay with, they may not be able to pay for transportation or other basic necessities.

The “While They Wait” Fund will help pay for necessities, immigration fees, and legal services for people who are asking to be granted legal status, including asylum, in the United States. A separate petition calls for a universal right to counsel for anyone facing immigration proceedings.

The Fund will be coordinated by BDS and RAICES. The petition, spearheaded by BDS, RAICES, and ACLU SoCal, marks the beginning of a campaign to focus attention on the lack of rights currently granted people in the immigration system and to demand legal counsel, fair procedures, and humane jail conditions for those facing the harsh consequences of deportation and family separation.

“The ‘While They Wait’ Fund allows people like Nilda and Keyden to achieve self-sufficiency during their long, uncertain, and costly wait to see if they will be allowed to stay in the United States,” said Lisa Schreibersdorf, Executive Director of Brooklyn Defender Services.

“Just days after Nilda was reunited with her son, she made clear that she wanted to tell her story so others would know what she had been through and hopefully prevent this type of travesty from happening to other parents and children,” said Scott Hechinger, Director of Policy for Brooklyn Defender Services. “This Fund will help carry out her hopes and forward the vision of the song and video, which is to bring awareness to the harsh reality of the journey from Central America.”

The “While They Wait” campaign will also call for a National Immigration Right to Counsel. Immigrants who have passed the first hurdle of our immigration system by crossing the border are often stuck in years-long immigration proceedings before they have their day in court and find out if they have gained lawful status in this country. Unlike in criminal cases, immigrants do not have a constitutional right to appointed counsel. The lucky ones are able to obtain the services of a pro bono attorney or an attorney from a non-profit organization, but thousands of people are deported every year without having ever had the advice of a knowledgeable attorney, even though the government has attorneys to argue against them.

“The lack of guaranteed counsel for immigrants is one of the largest travesties of justice in our country today,” said Jonathan Ryan, executive director of RAICES. “People, including those who are elderly, children, illiterate, understand limited English, or have been traumatized by their journey, cannot navigate this system on their own, and many of them are not able to establish valid claims that would be straightforward with an attorney’s assistance.”

----

[Brooklyn Defender Services](#) is a public defense office that provides full legal representation to over 35,000 people each year in criminal, child welfare and immigration cases. BDS is one of the first providers in the nation to provide universal legal representation to detained immigrants as part of the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project, a program developed by the New York City Council.

[RAICES](#) is one of the largest immigration legal services providers in Texas and a frontline organization in the roiling debate about immigration and immigrants in the world. In 2017, RAICES staff closed 51,000 cases at no cost to the client, providing consultations, direct legal services, representation, assistance and advocacy to communities in Texas and to clients after they leave the state.

[ACLU of Southern California](#) (ACLU SoCal) defends the fundamental rights outlined in the United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights. These include the right to freedom of speech and assembly, the right to religious freedom, due process of law, equality before the law and the right to privacy. The ACLU SoCal is working to expand immigrant detainees' access to legal representation and limit the government's power to detain them indefinitely.