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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NYC Public Defenders, Immigrant Rights Advocates Laud Court's Decision to Uphold City's Sanctuary Laws

By Granting City's Motion to Dismiss DOJ's Lawsuit, Court Protects Critical Protections for Immigrant New Yorkers

(NEW YORK, NY) – The Legal Aid Society, The Bronx Defenders, New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG), UnLocal Inc., LatinoJustice PRLDEF, Immigrant Defense Project, New York County Defender Services, Brooklyn Defender Services, Neighborhood Defender Services of Harlem, and Make The Road New York lauded the court's decision to grant New York City's motion to dismiss a lawsuit brought by the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) that challenged the City's sanctuary laws, which prohibit local law enforcement and city agencies from cooperating with federal immigration enforcement efforts.

In December 2025, the groups filed a joint amicus brief urging the court to dismiss the lawsuit, arguing that New York City's sanctuary laws provide critical protections to the City's more than three million immigrant residents, allowing them to fully participate in and engage with their communities. Removing these protections, the brief warned, would cause a chilling effect that would dissuade immigrants from interacting with city officials and agencies for fear of their immigration status being shared with federal immigration authorities.

New York City's sanctuary laws ensure that all New Yorkers, regardless of immigration status, have access to essential government services including food assistance, housing programs, public health services, domestic violence shelters, and more.

The laws enhance public safety and promote fairness within New York City's criminal legal system by ensuring immigrants can meaningfully participate in the criminal legal process without fear of being funneled by local authorities into immigration detention and deportation.

As the court affirmed today, City officials are not required to alter City laws in service of federal action that is wholly incompatible with the City's own policy priorities.

"Today's decision affirms New York City's right to uphold its values as a sanctuary city and protects the rights of millions of immigrants who call this city home," said **Paula Garcia Salazar, Staff Attorney in the Special Litigation Unit at The Legal Aid Society.** "The federal government cannot simply disregard decades of local policymaking to advance an aggressive deportation agenda, and we welcome the court's dismissal of this meritless challenge. The Legal Aid Society remains committed to defending the rights of every New Yorker, regardless of immigration status, and ensuring that all residents can access the public services and support they are legally entitled to without fear."

"Immigration enforcement separates New Yorkers from their families and communities and subjects people to serious mental and physical harm in detention. Local governments should not serve as a conduit for this cruel and frequently unconstitutional system," said **Lucas Marquez, Director of Civil Rights and Law Reform at**

Brooklyn Defender Services. "Sanctuary laws help ensure a robust, vibrant, and safe New York City, and the court's ruling shows that the federal government had no place attempting to undermine our city's critical protections. We will continue to defend the rights of New Yorkers, and urge the strengthening and enforcement of sanctuary protections."

"We applaud the court for upholding New York's historical sanctuary laws which protect all New Yorkers," said **Yasmine Farhang, Executive Director of the Immigrant Defense Project**. "For over thirty-five years our mayors and city councils have recognized the critical need for all New Yorkers to be empowered to participate in their communities without fear that interacting with city agencies will funnel them to federal immigration officials. We stand together committed to ensuring our sanctuary laws are protected and strengthened, not undermined."

"The court's decision upholding New York City's policies to support its immigrant residents is an important victory for the city and all New Yorkers," said **Rex Chen, Supervising Counsel for Immigrant Rights, LatinoJustice PRLDEF**. "Cities should be able to decide how their agencies serve and protect everyone who lives there, no matter their status, without meddling from the federal government. Policies about how people can call the city for help without fear of persecution build trust in municipal agencies and agents, so people can carry out all aspects of their everyday lives. The court correctly blocked the federal government from making unconstitutional demands on cities like New York. LatinoJustice will continue to defend New York's ability to protect all New Yorkers."

"UnLocal applauds the dismissal of the United States' lawsuit against the City of New York, which affirms what we already knew to be true: New York City is well within its right to keep our resources out of the business of federal immigration enforcement," said **Tania Mattos, Executive Director of UnLocal**. "We are proud to stand alongside New Yorkers in protecting our wisely and lawfully enacted sanctuary laws rather than facilitating Trump's mass deportation and detention agenda."

"New York's immigrant communities have been under attack for a year and a half by an administration hellbent on separating families. But thanks to New York's robust sanctuary policies, we've been able to at least blunt these attacks and keep more of our loved ones safe. New Yorkers of all backgrounds know that immigrants help make this city the beautiful, vibrant place that it is. That's why the people of this city have consistently elected legislators to enact laws that protect all New Yorkers, regardless of immigration status. Our sanctuary policies are a reflection of New York values — that everyone who builds a life here deserves the opportunity to thrive," said **Sienna Fontaine, Co-Executive Director of Make the Road New York**. "We are glad to see that a judge dismissed the Department of Justice's ridiculous lawsuit that was based on nothing but xenophobic fear-mongering."

"Today, a judge upheld New York City's decades-old sanctuary laws, which make our City a more just home for every New Yorker," said **Melissa Chua, Director of New York Legal Assistance Group's Immigrant Protection Unit.** "The Justice Department's actions were a failed attempt to tear apart our collective safety, rather than allow our institutions, leaders, and communities to uphold and protect the rights of every New Yorker, regardless of immigration status. In this critical moment, the courts must stand firm against attacks on the rule of law that defend our immigrant neighbors and U.S. citizens alike."

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The Legal Aid Society is a nonprofit law firm that exists for one simple yet powerful reason: to ensure that New Yorkers are not denied their right to equal justice because of poverty. For 150 years, we have protected, defended, and advocated for those who have struggled in silence for far too long. Every day, in every borough, The Legal Aid Society changes the lives of the people we serve and helps improve our communities.
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