



Needham Area Immigration Justice Task Force

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Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on the Judiciary
An Act Ensuring Access to Equitable Representation in Immigration Proceedings
Immigrant Legal Defense Act (ILDA)
S.1127 and H.1954

Sponsors Sen. Adam Gomez, Rep. David Rogers, Rep. Frank Moran)

Hearing November 25, 2025

Submitted by the Needham Area Immigration Justice Task Force; Cheryl Aglio-Girelli and Valerie Kistler, Co-Chairs; Karen Price, Legislative Liaison

The mission of the Needham Area Immigration Justice Task Force is to encourage dialogue and raise awareness regarding immigration as a necessary bedrock of a prosperous and growing United States of America. We take action to welcome immigrants, change unjust policies, and ensure fair working conditions and security for families.

The federal mass deportation program is flooding immigration courts, where having an attorney is a critical protection against deportation and permanent family separation. There is no right to a government-paid lawyer in immigration court. Those who cannot afford a lawyer must navigate our complex immigration proceedings alone.

Exact numbers vary, but it has been reported that about half of immigrants with pending cases are navigating their proceedings without a lawyer, and detained immigrants with a lawyer are more likely to win relief than are detained immigrants without one.

Although the FY26 budget inclusion of \$5 million for immigration legal aid is a great help, the Immigrant Legal Defense Act (ILDA) would establish a permanent line item in the annual budget to fund an immigration services program to increase access to legal representation for immigrants and refugees in the Commonwealth. The current funding runs through June 2026, and the need will likely persist beyond that date.

ILDA identifies criteria for those who are most at risk and requires legal representation to follow eligible Massachusetts residents who are detained in or transferred to out-of-state facilities.

The legislation also allows grantees to be private immigration law firms as well as nonprofits to help meet the demand for much-needed representation. It creates a formal advisory committee to provide oversight, guidance, and accountability, and provides for other valuable programs such as training and mentoring.

To help our vulnerable neighbors, we ask for your support of this bill.