

PAIFUP

*News from the fight for freedom, safety and dignity for all immigrants
detained or facing deportation in Pennsylvania.*

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What's Happening?

Happy New year!

PAIFUP had 2 clients released from detention thanks to the efforts of PAIFUP legal services and community organizations!

Check out a harrowing client success story below, along with articles from among the PA immigrant community.

Client Success: Christian

Cristian is from Venezuela, where he regularly attended peaceful pro-democracy protests the Chavez- and Maduro-led administrations as a student activist. At these protests and while he was a mere teenager, Cristian was targeted by the Venezuelan police, the Venezuelan National Guard, and government-backed militia groups for retaliatory harm that included being shot with rubber bullets and knocked unconscious with a homemade explosive, requiring emergency medical care and causing him to permanently lose his hearing in one ear. Following individualized death threats, Cristian fled to the United States in 2018 and affirmatively filed for asylum.

While waiting for his application to be adjudicated, however, he was arrested for a driving offense, sentenced to several days' incarceration, and placed in immigration detention during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. This detention significantly disrupted his ability to manage and medicate certain severe medical conditions, but PAIFUP counsel secured his release on bond at the end of 2020 and continued to represent him in his removal proceedings. Finally, in late 2023, Cristian was granted asylum in court, with DHS waiving appeal.

As an asylee, Cristian will now be able to remain and work in the United States, as well as, eventually, pursue residency and citizenship. In addition to being an accomplished artist and a savvy entrepreneur, he is currently undergoing training to become a clinical interpreter, in order to use his skills to help others.

Meet Our Team

Maria Thomson joined Nationalities Service Center in January 2024 as a staff attorney working on the Pennsylvania Immigrant Family Unity Project. At NSC, she provides pro bono representation to individuals in removal and bond proceedings before the Executive Office for Immigration Review and the Board of Immigration Appeals. Maria's role is split with the Defender Association of Philadelphia, where she also serves as an immigration specialist to advise criminal attorneys and clients about the immigration consequences of criminal charges and assist in negotiating immigration-safe outcomes. Prior to joining NSC, Maria also provided universal representation to immigrants in removal proceedings as an Oregon Worker Relief Fellow at Innovation Law Lab.



Maria graduated from the Temple University Beasley School of Law and Temple University School of Social Work with a joint JD/MSW degree in 2022, and she completed her B.A. at Swarthmore College in 2014. Maria got her start in immigration advocacy in 2012 as a volunteer at Annunciation House, a migrant shelter in El Paso, TX, and she continues to serve the organization as a member of the Board of Directors. She is fluent in Spanish.

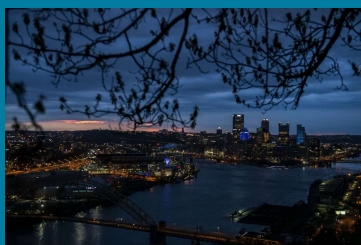
In Other News



Immigrants are often victims of loan sharks. Now, Pa. immigrants have a better option to pay their legal fees.

The nonprofit lender just expanded its services into Pennsylvania in partnership with the American Immigration Lawyers Association.

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Some states spurn migrants. The Rust Belt wants them.

Officials in several areas have objected to the cost of accommodating migrants bused in from the southern border, but Pittsburgh is setting out a welcome mat.

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Philly may become the first U.S. city to ban 'medical deportations'

After a three-year campaign, immigrant advocates are one step closer to banning the practice of medical deportation.

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Questions? Comments? News worth sharing? Send **Yomayra Burgos**, our PAIFUP coordinator, an email at yburgos@pirclaw.org.

The Pennsylvania Immigrant Family Unity Project (PAIFUP) is a collaborative of nonprofit organizations in Pennsylvania formed in order to achieve universal representation for detained immigrants facing removal proceedings in PA.

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