

Seattle Prepares to Provide \$1 Million to Illegal Immigrants for Legal Aid



Summary: *The city of Seattle is doing whatever it can to help illegal immigrants get past the threat of deportation instilled by the Trump administration.*

Seattle seems determined to make a name for itself as the most welcoming and generous city in the state, if not country. The day after filing a lawsuit against President Donald Trump's executive order on "sanctuary cities," Seattle is vowing to provide \$1 million for the legal defense of illegal immigrants threatened with deportation.

The City Council must approve the allocation of money but should it be approved, it would be given out in a competitive process to nonprofit organizations that provide legal representations to those in immigration court. The money would come from the city's general fund and could be disbursed as soon as June. The organizations would be expected to use the money to serve illegal immigrants with modest incomes, unable to afford to hire their own attorney.

Councilmembers M. Lorena Gonzalez and Tim Burgess are pushing for the money to be made available. Gonzalez said, "This legal-defense fund means that when our immigrant and refugee families, friends and neighbors go to immigration court, they will not be alone. We will stand hand in hand with these families as they defend their right to remain in this country."

Immigration cases are civil proceedings not criminal cases. Criminal cases provide a public defender for those who cannot afford to hire one on their own. Illegal immigrants accused or convicted of crimes would not be excluded from the legal aid.

Individuals with legal counsel in immigration-court are ten times more likely to win their case and be allowed to stay in the country than those without legal representation, Gonzalez said. She added that over one-third of illegal immigrants in Seattle over 90 percent of those in Tacoma do not have legal representation, "Compare that to the government, who is represented by an experienced immigration attorney 100 percent of the time."

There is little doubt that Seattle Councilmembers will pass the plan. The council voted in January to adopt a "welcoming cities" resolution that would include a provision to create a legal-defense fund. Seattle is already spending \$250,000 to provide illegal immigrants and refugees help in navigating life under the new laws, specifically in the school system. King County is contemplating setting aside an additional \$750,000 to help illegal immigrants learn about their rights, fight deportation, and become citizens.

Gonzalez claims that Trump's "mass-deportation plan" targets "all undocumented persons living and working in this country." Under Obama's administration, only those convicted of serious crimes were considered priorities for deportation. At one time this included those convicted of minor offenses like shoplifting. The Obama administration deported roughly 400,000 per year for the first five years.

Trump has taken a broader approach to the term "criminal." His executive order places anyone that has been charged with a criminal offense as priority for deportation. This includes anyone engaged in "fraud or willful misrepresentation in connection with any official matter or application before a governmental agency" such as those who use a false Social Security number to secure a job. Illegal immigrants that receive a final order to leave the country are also considered priority for deportation. His order defines criminals as those that have crossed the border illegally and abused any public benefits program.

Do you think Seattle taxpayers should be upset at how their money is being spent? Tell us in the comments below.

To learn more about immigration issues, read these articles:

- [Nevada Passes Law to Provide Driving Privilege Cards for Undocumented Immigrants](#)
- [Should Immigrants as Young as Three Represent Themselves in Court?](#)
- [California Law to Allow Illegal Immigrants Practice Law](#)

Photo: kuow.org

