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PRESS RELEASE

DOJ Cuts Immigrants' Access to Counsel in Latest Attack on Due Process

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Washington, D.C. – The Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR), part of the Department of Justice (DOJ), announced its intention to cancel the Legal Orientation Program (LOP) despite its immensely positive impact on judicial efficiency and fundamental fairness, and Congress' express instruction to continue such programming, along with the provision of funding in the fiscal year 2018 appropriations bill, recently signed by the president. Established in 2003, the LOP partners with non-profit organizations to provide individual and group presentations, workshops, and pro bono referral services to detained immigrants in removal proceedings.

"Terminating the LOP, a proven program established 15 years ago by then-President George W. Bush, will strip the immigration court system of critical resources that ensure the most basic commitment to fairness and due process," said Benjamin Johnson, Executive Director of the American Immigration Lawyers Association. "Defunding LOP and other tools like the immigration court information help desk means that many thousands of people will be ushered through the system without understanding their rights and how the process works. Without LOP, the court system will be less fair, less efficient, and more expensive. Cases will move more slowly and more people will be held in detention for longer periods of time, costing taxpayers millions of dollars. The termination of this vital program is the latest in series of new policies and announcements from DOJ that are nothing less than an assault on due process and fundamental fairness. It is time

for Congress to hold the Attorney General accountable and demand the Department of Justice keep the LOP running. The 2018 spending bill requires it, as does the U.S. Constitution which guarantees equal protection under the law for everyone.”

Karen Lucas, Director of the Immigration Justice Campaign, a project of the American Immigration Council and the American Immigration Lawyers Association, noted, “Ending the LOP is short-sighted and benefits no one. LOP is a critical resource for detained immigrants in a complex immigration court process that does not include government provided counsel. Studies have conclusively shown that LOP reduces the days people spend in detention and saves immigration judge and court time because noncitizens better understand the immigration system and whether they are eligible for relief. It is already far too rare for immigrants to receive a fair day in court as our laws and values require. LOP is the bare-minimum we can do improve access to information. They must be continued, or we all lose out.”

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For more information, please contact Maria Frausto at (/cdn-cgi/l/email-protection#f19c9783908482859eb1989c9c929e849f92989ddf9e8396) or 202-507-7526

1331 G St. NW, Suite 200, Washington, D.C., 20005 | 202-507-7500

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