Immigration Legal Services in Orange County: The Landscape, the Landslide and the Horizon

See Power Point Presentation

Moderator: Monica Glicken

Speakers: Lisa Ramirez & Caitlin Bellis

Historical Context: Lisa Ramirez

Immigration influx & anti-immigrant political history leads to tug of war

Amnesty of ’86 led to backlash, then legal service problems

Worked for DACA & Sanctuary Laws

Mid to late ’90s- status screening process, INS Detention, INS presence in city jails

2010’s- County detaining for ICE, detainees through contract, while Santa Ana ceased to house ICE detainees and worked to provide pro bono legal representation.

Dream is for no O.C. resident to face deportation proceedings without an attorney

Immigration Defense Landscape: Caitlin Bellis

People with legal counsel succeed 10 times more in removal proceedings

Challenges to legal defense:

Detention inherently coercive, complexity of law, incredibly high stakes, low resources in courts, lack of services (translation, interpretation, affordable phone calls, physical help)

Santa Ana universal representation program- leading the vision and way to transformation- was made possible by grassroot organizers

Lawyers can collaborate with organizers with what they learn in court

Current movement to end detention in Orange County
Laws and ordinances at state and local level discourage and restrict contracting with ICE (private prisons are an exception)

Challenges with jail closures- transferring counsel when detainees transferred, parole under ICE discretion (puts counsel on file to discourage from transfers)

Detainees now mostly in Adelanto and Otay

OC residents may not be able to access services for CA residents while detained in Adelanto

OC Providers should serve OC residents detained in LA

Funding Gaps: Travel (multiple hours), wait times (multiple hours), Client support services- mental health, specialty attorneys, and grassroots organizing and advocacy

Q&A:

- Trust built over years with clients cannot be fulfilled currently because there is lack of clear answers.
- Keep pushing CA’s political representatives to increase funding in our area
- Local advocacy can continue pushing to outlaw notaries
- Push for state to have specific access rights in their contracts
- Orange County Justice Fund has information at the event- support next fundraiser.