



Community Immigration  
Legal Services & Education

## **2021 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Public Protection**

**Wednesday, February 10, 2021, 9:30am**

**Testimony Presented by:  
Terry Lawson, Executive Director  
UnLocal**

Thank you for this opportunity to testify at today's hearing on public protection. My name is Terry Lawson and I am the new Executive Director of UnLocal, a community-centered non-profit organization that provides direct community education, outreach, and legal representation to New York City's undocumented immigrant communities. I would like to begin by discussing the work of UnLocal in the context of a recent case of ours that has been in the news.

Javier Castillo Maradiaga is a 27 year old Bronx resident who came here with his family when he was 7 years old. He was referred to UnLocal because we are one of founding partners of the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative, which is funded in part by the New York State Office of New Americans. In December 2019, Javier was unlawfully transferred from New York City Department of Corrections Custody to ICE in violation of New York City's Detainer Laws.

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Though Javier's criminal charges were subsequently dismissed and sealed, he remains in ICE detention and has been nearly deported three times since President Joe Biden's inauguration. To stop Javier's deportation, in the span of just two weeks, UnLocal filed two requests for a stay of removal, one with ICE and the other with the Board of Immigration Appeals, a motion to reopen his removal proceedings, a habeas petition, a motion for a preliminary injunction, and a memorandum of law with the Southern District of New York. We have held four press conferences, an online community gathering, and have gathered over 6000 signatures in a public petition. We have also engaged with legislators and elected officials at every level.

Before coming to UnLocal, Javier's family spent over \$20,000 in private legal fees to fight their immigration cases. Javier's mother has told me about how her family was taken advantage of by unscrupulous providers and how hard it was for them to find free high-quality legal representation. Their case came to our attention, via the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative, just days before Javier was transferred to Louisiana. If the events of the past two weeks have taught us anything, they have taught us that, while the Trump administration is no longer in power, this work is far from over. Deportation flights are still taking off, and UnLocal and immigration advocates across this city are working tirelessly alongside immigrant New

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Yorkers to ensure that they remain here with their families. Javier is DACA eligible, his siblings have DACA, his parents have TPS, and we are working tirelessly to provide immigrant New Yorkers, like Javier and his family, with free high quality legal services.

We appreciate the legislature and OCA's support of civil legal services. As Javier's case demonstrates, the need for this funding continues, particularly as immigrant communities battle the effects of COVID.

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