

STATE OF NEW YORK

9756

IN SENATE

April 2, 2026

Introduced by Sens. GIANARIS, BAILEY, BRISPORT, BROUK, CLEARE, COMRIE, COONEY, FAHY, FERNANDEZ, GONZALEZ, GOUNARDES, HARCKHAM, HINCHEY, JACKSON, KAVANAGH, LIU, MAY, MAYER, MYRIE, PARKER, PERSAUD, RAMOS, RIVERA, SALAZAR, SEPULVEDA, SERRANO, STAVISKY, WEBB -- read twice and ordered printed, and when printed to be committed to the Committee on Finance

AN ACT to amend the executive law, in relation to establishing the right to legal counsel in immigration court proceedings and providing for the administration thereof

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

Section 1. This act shall be known and may be cited as "the access to representation act".

§ 2. The executive law is amended by adding a new section 94-e to read as follows:

§ 94-e. Right to counsel in immigration court proceedings. 1. Definitions. As used in this section:

(a) "Administrator" means the director of the New York state office for new Americans.

(b) "Covered individual" means any income-eligible individual in detention in New York, transferred from detention in New York to immigration detention in another state, or who is subject to removal or inspection pursuant to 8 U.S.C. § 1229a or 8 U.S.C. § 1225 and their implementing regulations, or subject to a final order of removal under 8 C.F.R. § 1241.1, regardless of age, in a covered proceeding who is:

(i) a New York state domiciliary who is a non-United States citizen;

(ii) a New York state domiciliary who is a United States citizen or whose United States citizenship is in dispute; or

(iii) any individual whose proceedings have a significant nexus to New York state such that they should be provided relief under this statute.

Significant nexus shall be established in the following circumstances: if an individual is in detention or incarcerated in the state of New York, if an individual is transferred by federal immigration authorities from New York to immigration detention in another state, if an individual has an immigration case in a tribunal located in the state of New

EXPLANATION--Matter in italics (underscored) is new; matter in brackets [-] is old law to be omitted.

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1 York, if an individual is a New York domiciliary and detained by federal
2 immigration authorities anywhere in the United States, if an individual
3 had an immigration case located in a tribunal in New York before being
4 transferred by immigration authorities from detention in New Jersey to
5 immigration detention in another state or, as determined by the adminis-
6 trator or designee of the administrator.

7 (c) "Covered proceeding" means any proceeding in a covered venue in
8 which a covered individual is seeking an avenue of relief from removal
9 from the United States, or is challenging their arrest or detention
10 under the Immigration and Nationality Act ("INA"), as amended, and its
11 implementing regulations. A covered proceeding includes, if applicable,
12 a proceeding or hearing in immigration court; a proceeding before the
13 United States Citizenship and Immigration Services; a proceeding in a
14 tribunal located in New York for purposes of obtaining any order neces-
15 sary for or relevant to immigration relief; a habeas corpus or other
16 relevant petition to a federal district court challenging detention
17 under the INA; motions to reopen or reconsider under 8 U.S.C. § 1229(a);
18 a petition for review under 8 U.S.C. § 1252; a remand to a federal
19 district court from the United States Circuit Courts of Appeals for
20 fact-finding purposes; and any appeal related to any of the foregoing to
21 the Board of Immigration Appeals, the United States Circuit Courts of
22 Appeals, and/or the United States Supreme Court.

23 (d) "Covered venue" means: (i) an immigration court anywhere in the
24 United States where the case of a covered individual is located; (ii)
25 any tribunal located within New York state, including, but not limited
26 to, family courts and federal district courts; (iii) with respect to the
27 provision of legal services in the context of expedited removals, any
28 location within the borders of New York state where expedited removals
29 are processed; (iv) the Board of Immigration Appeals; (v) the United
30 States Circuit Courts of Appeals; (vi) the United States Supreme Court;
31 (vii) United States Citizenship and Immigration Services; and (viii) any
32 tribunal as determined by the administrator or a designee of the admin-
33 istrator on a case-by-case basis.

34 (e) "Domicile" means a principal location where a person, wherever
35 temporarily located, intends to reside.

36 (f) "Domiciliary" means a person that has established domicile with
37 respect to a particular jurisdiction.

38 (g) "Immigration court" means a tribunal of the Executive Office for
39 Immigration Review or a successor entity tasked with deciding the inad-
40 missibility or deportability of a noncitizen of the United States that
41 is presided over by an immigration judge as defined in 8 U.S.C. §
42 1101(b)(4).

43 (h) "Income-eligible individual" means an individual who is deemed
44 eligible for legal services in a covered proceeding based on pre-set
45 income-related criteria promulgated by the administrator, but in any
46 event must at a minimum include any individual whose annual gross house-
47 hold income is not in excess of two hundred percent of the federal
48 poverty guidelines as updated periodically in the Federal Register by
49 the United States Department of Health and Human Services under the
50 authority of 42 U.S.C. § 9902(2).

51 (i) "Legal services" means individualized legal assistance in a single
52 consultation and/or ongoing legal representation, provided by a legal
53 services provider to a covered individual, and all legal advice, advoca-
54 cy, and assistance, including but not limited to social service assist-
55 ance, associated with such service.

1 (j) "Legal services provider" means an individual, organization, or
2 association that has the authority to provide legal services and is
3 designated by the administrator to provide such services.

4 2. Right to counsel in immigration proceedings. (a) All covered indi-
5 viduals shall have the right to legal services as provided in this para-
6 graph.

7 (i) Covered individuals facing a covered proceeding shall have the
8 right to ongoing legal representation until termination is authorized
9 pursuant to paragraphs (c) and (d) of this subdivision.

10 (ii) Covered individuals facing a covered proceeding in a covered
11 venue other than an immigration court in New York or New Jersey shall
12 have the right to a consultation provided by a legal services provider,
13 and if found by the legal services provider to have a viable application
14 for appeal, challenge to a court order, or other form of relief from
15 removal from the United States, shall have the right to ongoing legal
16 representation.

17 (b) The right to counsel established in paragraph (a) of this subdivi-
18 sion shall attach:

19 (i) In the case of proceedings for removal pursuant to 8 U.S.C. §
20 1229a, upon receipt of a Notice to Appear, as defined in 8 U.S.C. §
21 1229. The obligations of this section shall be satisfied if counsel is
22 provided to a covered individual no later than their first appearance in
23 a covered proceeding, or as soon thereafter as is practicable.

24 (ii) In the case of removal proceedings pursuant to 8 U.S.C. § 1225,
25 upon the commencement of such proceedings, or as soon thereafter as is
26 practicable.

27 (iii) In the case of a referral to an immigration judge for a hearing
28 pursuant to 8 U.S.C. § 1231(b)(3) or 8 U.S.C. § 1158, upon receipt of a
29 Notice of Referral to Immigration Judge, or as soon thereafter as is
30 practicable.

31 (iv) In the case of a reinstatement of a final order of removal, upon
32 such reinstatement, or as soon thereafter as is practicable.

33 (v) In all other cases, as soon as is practicable.

34 (c) Subject to the provisions of paragraph (d) of this subdivision,
35 the right to counsel established in paragraph (a) of this subdivision
36 shall terminate:

37 (i) upon the termination or dismissal of removal proceedings or any
38 related appellate matter in respect of a covered individual by the immi-
39 gration court or other competent tribunal or authority;

40 (ii) upon the issuance of a final order or judgment in respect to a
41 covered individual's removal proceedings from which there remains no
42 opportunity for appeal or other avenue for relief including, but not
43 limited to, motions to reopen, motions to reconsider, and petitions for
44 review; provided, however, that legal services providers shall not be
45 required to pursue appeals or other avenues for relief that are specula-
46 tive or frivolous;

47 (iii) if an individual covered by virtue of being a New York state
48 domiciliary ceases to be a New York state domiciliary and establishes
49 domicile in a jurisdiction outside of New York state;

50 (iv) if an individual covered by virtue of being transferred from New
51 York to immigration detention in another state is released from
52 detention and is not a New York state domiciliary;

53 (v) if it is discovered that the initial determination that an indi-
54 vidual was an income-eligible individual was erroneous at the time that
55 such determination was made, as soon as such discovery occurs; provided,
56 however, that such individual will continue to be provided with legal

1 services pursuant to this subdivision for a reasonable amount of time to
2 enable such person to obtain alternative counsel, so as not to mate-
3 rially prejudice such individual's chance of success in any covered
4 proceeding;

5 (vi) if a covered individual knowingly and voluntarily waives the
6 right to counsel; or

7 (vii) upon a determination by a legal services provider after the
8 consultation described in subparagraph (ii) of paragraph (a) of this
9 subdivision that a covered individual facing a covered proceeding in a
10 covered venue other than an immigration court has no viable application
11 for appeal, challenge to a court order, nor other form of relief from
12 removal from the United States.

13 (d) Notwithstanding the requirements of paragraph (c) of this subdivi-
14 sion, the rights established in paragraph (a) of this subdivision shall
15 not terminate if:

16 (i) an immigration judge declines to allow a legal services provider
17 to withdraw from representing a covered individual; or

18 (ii) a legal services provider is prohibited from ceasing to provide
19 legal services pursuant to the New York Rules of Professional Conduct or
20 the Executive Office for Immigration Review's Practice Manual.

21 3. Powers and duties of the administrator. The administrator is
22 charged with implementing the requirements of this section no later than
23 January first of the sixth year following the effective date of this
24 section, and shall promulgate such rules, policies, and procedures
25 necessary and appropriate to accomplish such implementation no later
26 than January first of the first year following the effective date of
27 this section. Such rules, policies, and procedures shall include, but
28 not be limited to, the measures delineated in this subdivision, with
29 annual benchmarks to ensure full implementation by January first of the
30 sixth year following the effective date of this section. The adminis-
31 trator shall have the power and responsibility, independently and/or
32 through one or more designees, to:

33 (a) ensure that all covered individuals be advised of their right to
34 counsel and be offered legal services as provided in paragraph (a) of
35 subdivision two of this section;

36 (b) ensure independent, competent, high quality, and zealous represen-
37 tation of covered individuals receiving legal services provided pursuant
38 to this section;

39 (c) examine, evaluate, and monitor legal services provided pursuant to
40 this section;

41 (d) collect and receive information and data regarding the provision
42 of legal services not protected by attorney-client privilege, work prod-
43 uct privilege, or any other applicable privilege, or that can be
44 disclosed by legal services providers without violating the New York
45 Rules of Professional Conduct, including but not limited to:

46 (i) the types and combinations of such services being utilized across
47 the state;

48 (ii) the salaries and other compensation paid to individual adminis-
49 trators, attorneys, and staff in connection with the provision of such
50 services;

51 (iii) the caseloads of legal services providers providing legal
52 services in connection with the provision of such services;

53 (iv) the types, nature, and timing of dispositions of cases handled by
54 legal services providers providing legal services;

55 (v) the actual expenditures currently being made in connection with
56 the provision of legal services; and

1 (vi) the time, funds, and in-kind resources currently being spent on
2 providing such legal services and the amount being spent on ancillary
3 services such as support staff and expert witnesses;

4 (e) analyze and evaluate collected data, and undertake any necessary
5 research and studies, in order to consider and recommend measures to
6 enhance the provision of effective legal services and to ensure that
7 recipients of legal services are provided with quality representation
8 from fiscally responsible providers, which shall include but not be
9 limited to standards, criteria, and a process for qualifying and re-qua-
10 lifying legal services providers to provide legal services;

11 (f) establish measures of performance which programs shall regularly
12 report to the administrator to assist the administrator in monitoring
13 the quality of legal services;

14 (g) establish the standards and criteria used in programs to determine
15 whether individual legal services providers are qualified to provide
16 legal services;

17 (h) establish the criteria and procedures used to determine whether a
18 person is eligible to receive legal services, including requirements
19 related to income and domicile, and to track the number of persons
20 considered for and applicants denied such services, the reasons for the
21 denials, and the results of any review of such denials;

22 (i) establish standards and criteria for the provision of legal
23 services in cases involving a conflict of interest;

24 (j) develop recommendations to improve the delivery of legal services;

25 (k) target grants and establish strategic programs in support of inno-
26 vative and cost-effective solutions that enhance the provision of and
27 capacity for legal services, including, but not limited to, a capacity
28 building pipeline to bring new attorneys into the field and including
29 collaborative efforts serving multiple jurisdictions where covered indi-
30 viduals and covered proceedings are located;

31 (l) investigate and monitor any other matter relevant to the provision
32 of legal services which the administrator deems important;

33 (m) request and receive from any department, division, board, bureau,
34 commission, or other agency of the state or any political subdivision of
35 the state or any public authority such assistance, information, and data
36 as will enable the administrator to properly carry out its functions,
37 powers, and duties, subject to limitations on the disclosure of informa-
38 tion provided on a privileged basis to legal services providers, as well
39 as limitations on the disclosure of information by legal services
40 providers under the New York Rules of Professional Conduct;

41 (n) apply for and accept any grant or other source of funding for
42 purposes of carrying out the requirements of this section. Any sums so
43 received may be expended by the administrator to effectuate the fulfill-
44 ment of any such requirement, subject to any relevant requirements
45 related to the approval of expenditure of funds and audits of such
46 expenditures;

47 (o) develop, publish, and implement a written plan that establishes
48 numerical caseload/workload standards for all legal services providers,
49 with such plan to be completed and published within one hundred twenty
50 days after the effective date of this section, and to monitor and peri-
51 odically report on the implementation of and compliance with the plan;

52 (p) develop and implement a written plan, and to monitor and period-
53 ically report on the implementation of and compliance with such plan, to
54 improve the quality of legal services provided to covered individuals,
55 and to ensure that legal services providers providing such represen-
56 tation receive effective supervision and training, have access to and

1 appropriately utilize interpreters and expert witnesses on behalf of
2 clients, communicate effectively with their clients, have the necessary
3 qualifications and experience;

4 (q) beginning on September fifteenth, one year after the effective
5 date of this section, and by September fifteenth of each year thereaft-
6 er, submit a report to the governor, the speaker of the assembly, and
7 the temporary president of the senate, describing compliance with the
8 requirements of this section, including but not limited to:

9 (i) the criteria used to determine whether an individual is eligible
10 for legal services;

11 (ii) the procedures used to determine whether an individual is eligi-
12 ble to receive legal services;

13 (iii) the number of individuals deemed eligible and ineligible for
14 legal services;

15 (iv) the number of cases started and completed and the outcomes of
16 those cases; and

17 (v) qualitative review of the legal services provided; and

18 (r) beginning on September fifteenth, one year after the effective
19 date of this section, and by September fifteenth of every second year
20 thereafter, in consultation with the advisory committee, submit a report
21 to the governor, the speaker of the assembly, the temporary president of
22 the senate, and the director of the division of the budget, presenting
23 an analysis of qualitative and quantitative data on immigration court
24 cases and immigration enforcement activity and recommendations for
25 adjustments in funding to ensure compliance with this section.

26 4. Funding. (a) The state shall establish a dedicated fund and shall
27 appropriate sufficient sums into such fund to fully carry out the
28 requirements of this section. Funds necessary to fully carry out the
29 requirements of this section shall be determined annually by December
30 first of each year by the secretary of state, in consultation with the
31 administrator and the director of the division of the budget upon review
32 of the report submitted by the administrator pursuant to paragraph (r)
33 of subdivision three of this section.

34 (b) The administrator will be charged with ensuring that appropriated
35 funds are timely distributed to legal services providers for the
36 provision of legal services.

37 (c) Notwithstanding the requirements of paragraphs (a) and (b) of this
38 subdivision, sums appropriated to carry out the requirements of this
39 section shall be used to supplement and not supplant any state, local,
40 or private funding that is, or is anticipated to be, expended for the
41 provision of legal services to covered individuals, and the state shall
42 not be required to appropriate any funds for legal services to the
43 extent that obligations associated with the provision of legal services
44 are otherwise fully satisfied by funds received from state, local, or
45 private sources, or by the United States government in satisfaction of
46 any legal obligation.

47 5. Advisory committee. (a) There shall be an advisory committee which
48 shall work, in collaboration with the administrator, to develop
49 programs, policies, training, and procedures necessary to effectuate the
50 requirements of this section. The administrator shall collaborate with
51 the advisory committee on matters including, but not limited to:

52 (i) the rates of compensation for legal services;

53 (ii) community engagement efforts;

54 (iii) the sufficiency of access to and the quality of legal services
55 provided to covered individuals in covered venues;

1 (iv) the sufficiency of space available for designated providers in
2 covered venues;

3 (v) ensuring individuals with limited English proficiency have access
4 to appropriate translation services; and

5 (vi) other efforts by other states to support individuals facing
6 deportation.

7 (b) The advisory committee shall be comprised of nine members. The
8 governor shall appoint five members offering services to individuals in
9 covered proceedings, representing the geographic regions where covered
10 individuals and covered venues are located. The governor's appointees
11 shall further consist of no more than one representative of the private
12 bar and four representatives of legal services providers and represen-
13 tatives of community-based organizations offering services to covered
14 individuals. The speaker of the assembly and temporary president of the
15 senate shall appoint two members each. The administrator shall serve ex
16 officio. The governor shall designate one member to serve as chair of
17 the advisory committee.

18 (c) Each member, other than the member serving in an ex officio capac-
19 ity, shall serve for a term of two years, with initial terms for each
20 committee seat commencing ninety days after the effective date of this
21 section. Initial appointments under this subdivision must be made with-
22 in sixty days of the effective date of this section. Any vacancies
23 shall be filled promptly and in the same manner as the original appoint-
24 ment, and the appointee filling such vacancy shall serve for the unex-
25 pired portion of the term of the succeeded member. Any committee member
26 may be reappointed for additional terms. A member of the advisory
27 committee shall continue in such position upon the expiration of their
28 term and until such time as they are reappointed or their successor is
29 appointed, as the case may be.

30 (d) Members of the advisory committee shall serve without compen-
31 sation, but shall be allowed and reimbursed for their reasonable actual
32 and necessary expenses incurred in performance of their functions under
33 this section by the administrator.

34 (e) The advisory committee's initial meeting shall take place within
35 thirty days of the appointment of all required committee members under
36 paragraph (b) of this subdivision, or within ninety days of the effec-
37 tive date of this section, whichever is sooner. The advisory committee
38 shall meet no less than four times per year. The advisory committee may
39 establish its own procedures with respect to the conduct of its meetings
40 and its other affairs; provided, however, that the quorum and majority
41 provisions of section forty-one of the general construction law shall
42 govern all actions taken by the advisory committee.

43 (f) Membership on the advisory committee shall not constitute the
44 holding of an office. The advisory committee shall not have the power
45 to exercise any portion of the sovereign power of the state. No member
46 of the advisory committee shall be disqualified from holding any public
47 office or employment, nor shall such member forfeit any such office or
48 employment, by reason of the appointment of such member pursuant to this
49 section, notwithstanding the provisions of any other general, special,
50 or local law; ordinance; or city charter.

51 (g) Beginning on September fifteenth, one year after the effective
52 date of this section, the advisory committee shall produce a report
53 concerning its duties pursuant to this section and any related recommen-
54 dations, and such report shall be included in the report submitted by
55 the administrator to the governor, the speaker of the assembly, and the

1 temporary president of the senate under paragraph (q) of subdivision
2 three of this section.

3 6. No private right of action. Nothing in this section or the adminis-
4 tration or application thereof shall be construed to create a private
5 right of action on the part of any person or entity against the state or
6 any agency, instrumentality, official, or employee thereof.

7 7. Miscellaneous provisions. (a) Any legal services performed by a
8 legal services provider pursuant to this section shall not supplant,
9 replace, or satisfy any obligations or responsibilities of such legal
10 services provider pursuant to any other program, agreement, or contract.

11 (b) The provisions of this section shall supersede conflicting state
12 or local laws, rules, policies, procedures, and practices, except to the
13 extent that the provisions of any such state or local law, rule, policy,
14 procedure, or practice may provide any additional or greater right or
15 protection. Nothing in this section shall be interpreted or applied so
16 as to create any power, duty, or obligation prohibited by federal law.

17 (c) If any provision of this section or any application thereof to any
18 person or circumstance is held invalid, such invalidity shall not affect
19 any provision or application of this section that can be given effect
20 without the invalid provision or application. To this end, the
21 provisions of this section are severable.

22 § 3. This act shall take effect immediately.