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Denver rebukes DOJ's move to end funding for immigrant legal advice

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Denver elected officials say they “strongly condemn” the U.S. Department of Justice’s decision to suspend a George W. Bush-era program geared toward educating detained immigrants on their legal rights.

[In a letter to U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions](#) on Thursday, Denver Mayor Michael Hancock and the Denver City Council advocated for the DOJ to reverse course on its decision and allow the Legal Orientation Program (LOP) to continue.

“Terminating the LOP would eliminate vital protections for thousands of our community members who are separated from their loved ones and placed in civil immigration detention,” the letter reads.

[The DOJ announced earlier this month it would temporarily suspend funding for the LOP](#), just weeks before the program’s contract is set to expire, NPR reports. DOJ officials said the federal government needs time to review the effectiveness of the program, which is run nationally by non-profit Vera Institute of Justice. The program costs about \$6 million per year.

Vera serves more than 50,000 people per year and works with a network of like-minded organizations to carry out the LOP program across the country. In Colorado, the program is administered through the Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network (RMIAN).

As RMIAN and Denver officials note, those in immigration proceedings do not have a right to court-appointed counsel.

“Yet immigration law is incredibly complex, and for many of our community members, the stakes in these court cases could not be higher,” Denver officials say in the letter.

The LOP helps bridge that legal gap, providing immigrants with legal information and referrals to pro-bono legal counsel, among other services.

At the immigration detention center and immigration court in Aurora, Denver officials say just 9 percent of people have legal representation during proceedings.

“To abruptly end this program would have a devastating impact on access to justice for immigrants in Denver and beyond,” the letter reads.

Read [Hancock and the City Council’s full letter here](#) [link omitted]

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