

Gov. Pritzker Signs Package Of Legislation That Expands Protections For Immigrant And Refugee Communities

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SPRINGFIELD – Building on efforts to protect immigrant and refugee communities, Governor JB Pritzker today signed House Bill 709 and House Bill 2790 into law, further cementing Illinois’ leadership as the most welcoming state in the nation. The new laws help provide legal representation for immigrant residents in Cook County and launch statewide public information campaigns to ensure immigrants and refugees in Illinois know their rights.

“The legislation I’m signing today builds on our nation-leading efforts to make Illinois a welcoming state for immigrants and refugees,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “I’m proud that these critical protections advance our mission to give our immigrant neighbors the equitable representation they deserve. Everyone should feel safe and secure in the place they call home and I remain committed to ensuring that our efforts to protect immigrant communities define what it means to live, work, and thrive in Illinois.”

House Bill 709

To ensure immigrant communities know their rights, the legislation requires the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), in consultation with other state agencies, to conduct public information campaigns to help educate immigrants of their rights under the U.S. Constitution and Illinois laws.

The public information campaign will include resources and contact information for organizations that can help protect the rights of immigrant communities. This applies to refugees, asylum seekers, and other noncitizens residing in Illinois, regardless of their immigration status. The information will be posted in high-traffic public areas, such as train stations, airports, and highway rest stops.

"In America, every human being, regardless of citizenship status, maintains certain rights. That's something that a lot of people are unaware of, including those it impacts most," said State Representative Jennifer Gong-Gershowitz (D- Glenview). "This important legislation provides that the Department of Human Services conduct a public information campaign to educate people about their rights."

HB 709 is effective immediately.

House Bill 2790

To expand protections for all residents under local and federal laws, HB 2790 creates a path for the Cook County Public Defender’s Office to represent immigrants in removal proceedings in Cook County. The legislation ensures there are no jurisdictional conflicts, such as lawsuits against the county to prevent or prohibit public defenders from representing clients in federal immigration court.

In counties with a population of more than 3 million, the bill states that a public defender can act as an attorney to noncitizens without a fee or an appointment in immigrant cases. The law is limited to circumstances located within the geographical boundaries of the county where the public defender is appointed, unless the board authorizes representation outside of the county. If an individual who does not speak

English as a first language is being detained and faced with representing themselves in immigration court, this legislation helps ensure they have fair and equitable representation.

"Every person deserves representation in a courtroom, regardless of immigration status or income level. As an immigration and human rights attorney, this legislation is very personal to me," said State Representative Jennifer Gong-Gershowitz (D- Glenview). "HB2790, Defenders for All, now allows Cook County Public Defenders to represent immigrants who lack legal representation during immigration proceedings."

The two bills build on the Governor's ongoing efforts to protect the safety and wellbeing of immigrant and refugee families. Earlier this month, the Governor signed a package of legislation that strengthens the TRUST Act, expands protections for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients, and creates the Illinois Immigration Impact Task Force. Governor Pritzker also issued an Executive Order creating the Welcoming Illinois Office.

Previously, the Governor signed legislation that banned the establishment of private, for-profit immigrant detention centers and took action to prevent landlords from wrongfully using a tenant's immigration status against them. The administration also provided undocumented students with access to state financial aid. During the pandemic, the administration offered a significant relief for Illinois families, regardless of their immigration status, to protect their health and economic security.

HB 2790 is effective January 1, 2022.