

Immigrant Legal Advice Program Resumes After Pressure from Congress



Summary: Jeff Sessions reversed his decision to end the Legal Orientation Program, designed to give free legal advice to undocumented immigrants.

Only weeks after ending a free legal advice program for undocumented immigrants, Attorney General Jeff Sessions has reversed course.

On April 12, Sessions suspended a national immigrant legal advice program, stating that he wanted to review its effectiveness. The halt caused controversy from critics who said that it was not only wrong to deny immigrants due process but also that removing the program ended up wasting more money in the long run.

CNN reported that Sessions announced the change at a hearing in front of the Senate Appropriations subcommittee that funds the Justice Department. He said that Congress wanted him to reinstate the Legal Orientation Program, which was created in 2003.

The program was created during President George W. Bush's administration, and it allowed nonprofits and activist groups to provide free legal advice services to undocumented immigrants regarding issues such as deportation. While American citizens are allocated free lawyers during criminal proceedings, undocumented immigrants are not given the same.

The Department of Justice announced earlier this month that it wanted to suspend the program to review whether or not it was cost-effective, and on Wednesday, Sessions told the subcommittee that he was reinstating the program after speaking with bipartisan Congress members.

"Out of deference to the committee, I have ordered that there be no pause while that review is conducted," Sessions said. "I look forward to evaluating the findings as are produced and will be in communication with this committee when they are available."

In 2012, the DOJ audited the program and found that it saved the government nearly \$18 million a year because it decreased the amount of time that undocumented immigrants were detained or in the court system.

Kate Vickery, the executive director of the legal services organization, told the [Texas Tribune](#) that although this reversal was good news, it does not mean that the program is permanently saved.

"While this is wonderful news today, we worry that we will be facing the same situation in the future if the DOJ's audit does not support the continuation of the program," Vickery said. "As a community, we need to recognize the importance of supporting programs that provide due process and information for immigrants facing deportation."

According to [KRDO](#), an internal study recommended that the free legal service be expanded because the program helps immigrants move through the justice system faster. Currently, the immigration courts are backlogged, which results in immigrants staying in the US for years waiting for their deportations to process.

- [Trump Endorses Plan to Cut Immigration Numbers](#)
- [Immigration Groups Allege U.S. Border Patrol and Customs Illegally Turns Away Latino Asylum Seekers](#)
- [Backlog of Immigration Court Cases Hits Record High](#)

What do you think about the Legal Orientation Program? Let us know in the comments below.