

PAIFUP

News from the fight for freedom, safety and dignity for all immigrants

detained or facing deportation in Pennsylvania.

November 2023 | Issue 8

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What's Happening?

Thanks to a multi-org effort we have secured a second year of funding from Pittsburgh! This will allow us to continue to serve the residents of Allegheny County for another year and hopefully more! Thanks to the city of Pittsburgh for your efforts to be welcoming and responsive to the needs of the immigrant communities there.

PAIFUP had 2 clients released from detention thanks to the efforts of PAIFUP legal services and community organizations!

Check out two harrowing client success stories below, along with articles from among the PA immigrant community.

Client Success: E

EP was living a version of the American dream. EP's father sponsored him to come from Haiti and obtain his green card. He moved his family to New York, where he was able to obtain a good job making purchases for a medical lab. After the attacks of September 11, EP felt it necessary to move his family from away NY to Philadelphia. He kept working hard, while helping to build a church and become a respected Deacon in his community. EP and his wife raised four successful adult daughters. But his dream quickly became a nightmare, when a troubled teenager who he knew from birth and considered like a daughter accused him of sex crimes. He was referred to the Innocence Project after being convicted by a jury, because he would not plead to anything he maintained he had not done.

At the time EP left Haiti in 1999, he lived in a pleasant neighborhood outside of Port-au-Prince. What had been a safe neighborhood is now the sight of frequent gang attacks and kidnappings. EP had no enemies. But with help from PAIFUP attorneys, an expert witness help to explain to the removal court that because of EP's "Americanization" and criminal history, he would become a target for kidnappers. The immigration court granted EP protection from removal to Haiti under the United Nations Convention Against Torture. EP's wife and daughters, who stood by him through his American nightmare, now take some solace that they won't be separated from the person they admire most.

Client Success: J

After over 14 months of detention, Mr. J was granted protection under the convention against torture and released from ICE custody in November 2023, returning to the Philadelphia area and the place he has called home for over 20 years.

Mr. J was kidnapped by a rebel group at the age of 6, tortured by warlords, and made to witness atrocities, many committed by individuals who would later become powerful political figures in his native Liberia. After six years of enduring this trauma, he fled from Liberia to a refugee camp in Ghana before he and his family were ultimately resettled in Philadelphia in 2003. When he and his family came to the United States, he was a teenager, still suffering from that trauma. In 2008, he was placed into proceedings before an immigration judge, where he faced the threat of deportation. At the time, Pennsylvania did not provide any *pro bono* legal services to individuals in detention, and he was forced to represent himself, testify at length about the torture he had experienced in a language he did not speak fluently, and proceed without an assessment of how trauma affected his ability to participate in his case. He was ordered deported. However, he was released after six months in detention to reside and work in the U.S. while the government attempted to secure travel documents for him to return to Liberia. He continued building his life in Philadelphia, attending his immigration check-ins, working in delivery and food service jobs, and starting a family.

Then, in 2022, he was abruptly detained once again and told he would be deported. This came due to a change in U.S. relations with Liberia that caused Liberia to issue travel documents for Liberians, including those with very old deportation orders. Mr. J was terrified to return to Liberia. Upon detention and under the threat of deportation, he began to suffer a mental health crisis, and was diagnosed with schizophrenia spectrum and other psychotic disorder. Under threat of imminent deportation, his PAIFUP lawyer acted quickly to attempt to reopen his case and stop his deportation. He met his PAIFUP counsel a few days before Christmas in 2022, two weeks before the government planned to deport him. His lawyer worked throughout the holidays to stop his deportation right before he was placed on a plane, filing a stay of removal and a motion asking an immigration judge to reopen his case in light of the serious due process violations that occurred at his prior hearing and his eligibility for relief. The judge agreed that his case should be reopened in February 2023, and he was ultimately afforded a full and fair process before the Immigration Court, first at a competency hearing, where he was represented by counsel and had the benefit of a psychological evaluator to discuss his trauma affected his ability to testify and proceed in his case. At his final merits hearing, an IJ granted him relief from deportation. Though the government waived appeal of this decision, ICE refused to release Mr. J for over two months after his grant of relief. After intervention from his counsel, Mr. J was ultimately released in November 2023 to return home.

Mr. J is grateful to the PAIFUP program for giving him a second chance at life. He hopes to share his story through a book he began writing about his life while in detention and through motivational speaking about overcoming one's traumas and seeing the light through the darkness. He credits his PAIFUP team as having taught him "that there is sunshine in the dark," and he hopes to help others by sharing his story, to show them that they should not be "afraid to come out of the dark and into the light." After he was released, he told his PAIFUP attorney, "I am so grateful to be alive and breathing."

In Other News



Pitt to host first Latinx Connect Conference

Pitt will commemorate the end of Latinx and Hispanic Heritage Month with Latinx Connect, a virtual conference.



50 Years of Community Advocacy



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FOLLOWING THE PASSING OF JUAN RAMOS, AL DIA TAKES STOCK OF THE ACTIONS OF THE PUERTO RICAN leader ACTIVIST THROUGHOUT HIS CAREER.

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President Joe Biden made an urgent plea over the weekend for US support to bolster Ukraine and Israel at a time of war, saying the world faces "an inflection point" that could set the course for the next generation.

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Questions? Comments? News worth sharing? Send **Yomayra Burgos**, our PAIFUP coordinator, an email at yburgos@pirclaw.org.

The Pennsylvania Immigrant Family Unity Project (PAIFUP) is a collaborative of nonprofit organizations in Pennsylvania formed in order to achieve universal representation for detained immigrants facing removal proceedings in PA.

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