



Bienvenidos a

The Latin American Legal Defense and Education Fund



(609)-688-0881

apoyo@laldef.org

716 S. Clinton Ave, Trenton, NJ 08611

Today's talk

- Our history
- Serving immigrant communities today
- Our services





LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As the Executive Director of LALDEF, it is my pleasure to present you with our 2025 Impact Report. While 2025 has brought historic challenges for the immigrant community, we have never been more certain that our organization was made for this moment.

Since it first opened its doors in 2004, LALDEF has been a champion for immigrant rights and integration. As immigration policies and enforcement continue to evolve, LALDEF is proud to stay the course, providing the same support and dignified service that our clients have come to expect from us for over 20 years. It is a privilege to share the moments and milestones that made up our 2025, and we hope you will continue to stand with us in the months and years ahead.

Cecy Jimenez-Weeast, Executive Director

Our history
(22 years
strong!)

LALDEF: Early days

- **2004:** Concerned Mercer County residents see the additional stress and marginalization on immigration communities **after 9/11**
- Form volunteer, community-based, non-funded coalition to address these issues
- Anne Reeves (Arts Council of Princeton), Ryan Lilienthal (immigration attorney), Ann Yasuhara, representatives from Princeton Friends Meeting



LALDEF: Early days

- One of first efforts was Community ID Cards in Princeton
- “When a Princeton resident was unable to get dialysis treatment from the hospital and a local mother was prohibited from buying over-the-counter cough medicine for her sick child, [it was] because they did not have proper ID” (*The Princeton Sun*, 2014).



LALDEF: Expansion to Trenton



- By 2008...
- Open up to Trenton through healthcare initiatives...
- Then FUTURO...
- First community center on Chambers Street in 2013



LALDEF: Expansion to Trenton

- Permanent residence allowed for -
- Expansion of ID card program
- English and computer literacy classes
- Tax preparation program
- General expansion of hours and services





LALDEF: Today

- 2018 – Casa de Bienvenida on S Clinton Ave
- Refuge for local immigrant population
- Expansion of hours, supports, & services



Serving immigrant communities today: what has changed in 22 years?

LALDEF: broad shifts

- Beyond Latin American communities (e.g., Haitian)
- Beyond Spanish language services (e.g., Haitian Creole)
- Expansion to work with community partners (solidarity- and coalition-building)





LALDEF: Today

- Increased fear, anxiety, invisibility
- Increased vigilance and security
- We continue to serve our community with strength and dignity



LALDEF: Today

- More clients requesting different services (e.g., creation of Power of Attorney to prepare for detention and/or deportation)
- More restrictions (e.g., harder citizenship test)
- More people in need of services
- Focus on educating clients to mitigate fear-based reactions





Our services

Our Mission



Established in 2004, Latin American Legal Defense and Education Fund, Inc.'s (LALDEF) mission is to promote the rights of all immigrants (with a focus on the Latin American community in the Mercer County area); facilitate access to health care, education, and legal representation; advocate for the integration of immigrants; and foster intercultural communication that strengthens our communities.



Our Core Services



Legal services

FUTURO – Youth
mentoring
program

Mercer County
Community ID
cards

Promote
equitable
healthcare

Client advocacy

Adult education

Latinas Unidas
program



Legal Services

LEGAL SERVICES

LALDEF's Immigration Legal Services department is dedicated to supporting immigrants in Mercer County as they navigate the pathway to permanent status in the United States. Amidst a rapidly-changing immigration client, LALDEF remains committed to ensuring that the most vulnerable members of our community know their rights and can access quality, low-cost legal services.



We cover...

- Filing of applications for naturalization and citizenship
- Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)
- Adjustment of status
- Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) provisions
- U Visas for victims of crimes
- T Visas for human trafficking victims
- Renewals of green cards and work permits
- Temporary Protected Status (TPS)
- Special Immigrant Juveniles (SIJ)

In 2025, we assisted with

316
immigration
legal cases

In 2025, we provided

302
free legal
consultations

Legal Immigration Services

LALDEF offers assistance with a variety of immigration matters, through low-cost legal support on a limited basis. Some examples include:

- **Citizenship applications**
- **Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)**
- **Special Immigrant Juvenile Status**
- **Legal Permanent Residency**
- **Employment Authorization**
- **U and T visas**





FUTURO

FUTURO

YOUTH MENTORING PROGRAM

LALDEF's FUTURO initiative is a high-impact youth mentoring program for first- and second-generation immigrant high school students. FUTURO provides students with academic support, SAT preparation, college application assistance, mentoring, social support, and community service opportunities.



FUTURO students visiting Princeton University



FUTURO



INTENDED MAJORS INCLUDE

- Nursing
- Business
- Political Science
- Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering
- Computer Science
- Communications
- Media and Communications
- Electrical Engineering
- Architecture
- Psychology
- English
- Mechanical Engineering
- Advertising and Graphic Design
- Culinary Arts

Number of
clients/students
served throughout
the year:

162

Amount
awarded in
financial aid,
grants, and
scholarships:

\$813,299

Total
Graduates
for the class
of 2025

22

COLLEGES INCLUDE



STUDENT STORY...

"I am from Guatemala and have been in Lawrenceville for 14 years. I learned about LALDEF a couple of years ago when they started processing IDs for immigrants. I believe it is an organization that greatly assists families who immigrate to this country in search of a better life and provides our children with the opportunity to understand that they can achieve more. It teaches them that there are many paths to success. I am very grateful for the opportunity you have given my daughter and all these children who seek to succeed in life as professionals."

- FUTURO Familia,
parent of Class of 2025 scholar

"I am currently a 12th grader [..], my family is from Ecuador, and I was raised in New Jersey. I first heard about FUTURO through my older brother, who was part of the program and encouraged me to join. Being part of FUTURO has been an amazing experience. It's guided me through the challenges of college admissions and helped me feel more prepared for what's ahead. What's meant the most to me is the community—being surrounded by others who share similar backgrounds and goals has been incredibly motivating and comforting. I'm truly grateful for the support and sense of belonging that FUTURO has given me."

- FUTURO Class of 2026 student

PARENT TESTIMONIAL...



Mercer County Community ID Cards

Mercer County Community Identification Cards



The Mercer County Area Community ID Card extends to the cardholder the ability to prove both identity and residency in the County. It only requires proof of address and other identification.

This ID card may be used at places such as:

- Police Stations
- Public libraries
- Public schools
- Certain banks, pharmacies, or stores



In 2025, LALDEF issued **1,882 Mercer County Community IDs**, serving as a trusted gateway for individuals to access vital services.

The Community ID program offers residents of Mercer County the opportunity to identify themselves, prove their address, and have an emergency contact on file at all times.

The community ID cards provide access to services at locations such as:

- **Municipal and social service agencies**
- **Schools**
- **Clinics**
- **Food pantries**
- **Parks**
- **Post offices**
- **Libraries**

The Mercer County Community ID program was launched in 2011 through the **One Community Coalition** after identifying the many obstacles that members of our community without identification faced. LALDEF partners with organizations such as the **Trenton Area Soup Kitchen (TASK)**, the **Rescue Mission of Trenton**, and the **Trenton Psychiatric Hospital** to provide IDs to any underserved population in need of identification.

Promote equitable healthcare

LALDEF is committed to providing low-income immigrants in Mercer County, NJ with equitable, culturally and linguistically accessible healthcare resources. Through our free healthcare initiatives, we have been able to combat the barriers, fears, and misinformation which has historically led to poorer health outcomes for the Latino community, including higher mortality rates.

In 2025, LALDEF hosted its annual Hispanic Heritage Month Wellness and Resource Fair, as well as 220 vision screenings, 66 eyeglass vouchers, 53 mammograms, and 25 vaccinations.



In 2025, we facilitated

53
MAMMOGRAMS

220
VISION SCREENINGS

66
EYEGLOSS VOUCHERS

25
VACCINATIONS

MAMMOGRAM EXTRAVAGANZA EVENT

In 2025, LALDEF teamed up with the Trenton Health Team's NJCEED program to provide semi-annual mammogram screenings.

These events provided free mammograms to 53 women who reported a family history of breast cancer or who were ages 40 years and older.

At the event, clients also had the opportunity to connect with healthcare providers to schedule other types of cancer screenings.



Mammogram Van outside
LALDEF's headquarters

FREE EYE SCREENINGS

LALDEF, in collaboration with **Project BEST**, continued its free eye screening program throughout 2025. This program provides community members with free eye exams; we have also been able to provide referrals to free glasses for those in need of financial assistance. **This year, 220 community members participated in free eye screenings at LALDEF's headquarters, and 66 individuals were referred for free eyeglasses.** This program is offered on the last Monday of each month.



Client Advocacy

LALDEF's Client Advocates provide our community with hands-on assistance to navigate a variety of concerns, including identification, unemployment, food stamps, housing, and other vital social services.

Advocacy

Our advocacy services include:

- Translations of documents in English and Spanish
- Notarizations
- Referrals and information about other services in Trenton, as needed
- Assistance applying for different social services in Mercer County, such as SNAP and NJ FamilyCare





184

Translations of birth certificates, identification documents, and more:

252

Cases in which Client Advocates provided support with a variety of concerns, including identification, health insurance, unemployment, food stamps, housing, and other vital social services.

90

Notarizations of documents to facilitate access to driver's licenses in our community:



Adult Education

Adult Education

LALDEF commits itself to helping clients to achieve and perfect the necessary abilities for self-sufficiency. Classes include: **ESL, GED and Citizenship Classes.** In January of 2026, LALDEF began offering a virtual Spanish class for professionals.

In addition, LALDEF has a contract with Mercer County to serve referred One-Stop Career Center clients with ESL courses and community work experience hours.



LALDEF's Adult Education program enhances client quality of life by providing empowerment through education. Our expansive catalogue of course offerings equips our clients with greater knowledge of the English language, leading to improved outcomes in education, employment, and more. Our GED courses play a key role in advancing and furthering client education, while our citizenship courses equip future citizens with the knowledge and skills needed to pass the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) citizenship exam.

"I am from Venezuela, and I moved to the USA in 2020. I did not speak English. I arrived in New Jersey in 2022 and I have one year studying English. I live with my brother here in New Jersey.

My experience with LALDEF has been positive. ESL classes have helped me. I can express myself better and I understand more. I felt welcome at LALDEF and the organization [is] helping people like me."

- LALDEF Level 2 ESL Student, in his own words



Latinas Unidas

LATINAS UNIDAS PROGRAM



LALDEF's Latinas Unidas program is a support group for Latina women in the Mercer County community. Latinas Unidas members have the opportunity to share and learn about a number of topics relevant to women today, including healthcare, education, financial literacy, and more. In addition to hands-on workshops and educational opportunities, the Latinas Unidas program provides participants with a forum to share resources, goals, and dreams with a community of supportive, like-minded women.

2025 Workshops

- **Healthy Relationships**
(Planned Parenthood) - January 2025
- **Better Financial Habits**
(Bank of America) - February 2025
- **Cervical Cancer Presentation**
(Planned Parenthood) - March 2025
- **Nutrition and Colorectal Cancer**
(Crossroads 4 Hope) - April 2025
- **Art Therapy** (LALDEF) - May 2025
- **Mental Illness** (NAMI Mercer) - June 2025
- **Zumba Class** (LALDEF) - July 2025
- **Beginner Entrepreneurs**
(Rising Tide Capital) - August 2025
- **Teenage Cyber Security Awareness**
(Princeton Public Library) - September 2025
- **Understanding Menopause and Its Changes**
(Planned Parenthood) - October 2025
- **Know your Rights**
(LALDEF) - November 2025
- **Lotería Entre Mujeres:
Health, Strength, and Community**
(Planned Parenthood) - December 2025



Latinas Unidas



A support program for Latina women in our Mercer County community. Here, they have the opportunity to come together and learn about topics designed for women.

They meet every third Friday of the month at our Trenton office.



Worker's Rights in NJ



1

Earned Sick Leave

Employers of all sizes must provide full-time, part-time, and temporary employees with up to 40 hours of earned sick leave per year so they can care for themselves or a loved one.

2

Temporary Disability Insurance

This program provides cash benefits to New Jersey workers who have to stop working due to a physical or mental health condition or other disability unrelated to their work.

3

Family Leave Insurance

This program provides cash benefits to New Jersey workers who are unable to work because they need to care for a family member with a physical or mental health condition, bond with a newborn, newly adopted or newly placed foster child, or handle certain matters related to domestic or sexual violence.

4

Unemployment Insurance

Unemployment Insurance (UI) is a program that gives financial support to people who lose their jobs through no fault of their own and are based on wage information from your employers in the last 18 months.

For more information on any of these programs, visit: myworkrights.nj.gov

Our wonderful team!

OUR KEY STAFF

Cecy Jimenez-Weeast, Executive Director

Caty Dominguez, Community Outreach Coordinator

Yessenia Lopez, Office Manager

Lorena Morales, Adult Education Coordinator

Griselda Pachuca-Garcia, FUTURO Coordinator

Angelica Stern, Director of Development and Communications

Our wonderful team!

OUR BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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Follow us!



CONTACT US

LATIN AMERICAN LEGAL DEFENSE &
EDUCATION FUND

714-716 S Clinton Avenue

Trenton, NJ 08611

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*Come visit us in Princeton each Tuesday from 1:00 pm to 3:30 pm at Nassau Presbyterian Church
and the Princeton Library from 4 pm to 6:30 pm.*



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If you can,
please
consider
donating



SCAN HERE TO
DONATE TO LALDEF
TODAY!



Founded in 2004, the **Latin American Legal Defense and Education Fund (LALDEF)** promotes the rights of all immigrants (with a focus on the Latin American community in the Mercer County area); facilitates access to health care, education and legal representation; advocates for the integration of immigrants; and fosters inter-cultural communication to strengthen our communities.

The organization's programs fall into two key areas:

- (1) Immigration legal services and
- (2) community outreach and education, which includes client advocacy, adult education, youth mentoring and development, and more.





¡GRACIAS!

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