



## January 2017 Tip of the Month

# POST ELECTION ADVICE FOR THE REFUGEE AND IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES

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As Volunteer Lawyers Network staff and volunteers we are experiencing first-hand the effect the election results are having in the refugee and immigrant communities in Minnesota. Emotions and thoughts range from uncertainty, fear, and hopelessness, to injustice, anger, and a sense of “we are used to this.” People have become more emboldened to act out anti-immigrant sentiments publicly. For our clients this means children are afraid their parents will be forced to leave them. Immigrant clients are afraid to ride the bus, their only form of transportation. Places of worship are desecrated. And students who defend themselves against anti-immigrant bullying are punished. In the midst of this, how can we help our immigrant clients?

Here’s what I tell people:

- **You are not alone.** Many people across the nation are experiencing the same feelings and emotions. Many people nationally and locally are mobilizing to ensure that peoples’ rights are protected, including those of immigrants.
- **Some things won’t change.** Refugees and people with permanent resident status in the U.S. should not be affected by any future changes in our immigration system.
- **Some things won’t change quickly or easily, but others may change soon.** For most undocumented people in the USA, we simply do not know what the new administration plans to do. And realistically, the USA does not have the resources to deport millions of people quickly or effectively. That being said, some

people may face heightened immigration enforcement such as those with criminal histories, prior immigration violations, and more recent arrivals. So, it is important to be prepared.

- **Have a plan.** There are many things individuals and families can do to prepare themselves for the worst case scenario, for example:
  - Collect, copy and keep in a safe place documents they may need quickly like identity documents, birth and marriage certificates, proof of residence, employment and payment of taxes in the U.S. Make sure a trustworthy friend or family member has access to these documents too.
  - Plan for who will care in the short or long-term for their children in case they are detained by immigration.
  - Save money now in case they need to hire a lawyer or pay a bond to get out of immigration detention.
  - Memorize the names and numbers of people who can help them if they are detained.
- **Keep on “Dreaming.”** Unfortunately, the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) program may end. But there may be other statutory solutions put in place to replace it. We do not yet know what will happen, but remain hopeful. In the meantime, VLN is available to help DACA holders or applicants to determine whether they should apply for or renew their DACA status, whether they should travel, and if they have another form of immigration relief.
- **Seek Information from Reliable Sources.** There are a lot of rumors circulating in the community. It is important to distinguish between good and bad information to avoid being scammed.

There are many nonprofits that provide free legal information and advice like the Volunteer Lawyers Network, and there are many trustworthy private immigration and other lawyers, in Minnesota.

Seek out information and advice from them and avoid “notarios” or other unlawful practitioners of the law.

- **Speak Truth to Abuse.** Report to your school or the police if you are a victim of or witness to bullying or a crime, including a hate crime.
- **Unite.** Join immigrant advocacy and community groups to work together to protect the rights of refugees and immigrants.

For more information about how you can help VLN help our refugee and immigrant clients by providing free legal advice and service contact [colleen@vlnmn.org](mailto:colleen@vlnmn.org).