

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Vermont Legal Aid and Vermont Asylum Assistance Project Launch Immigration Community Lawyering Initiative

Burlington VT, January 27, 2026

The Vermont Asylum Assistance Project (VAAP) and Vermont Legal Aid (VLA) are thrilled to announce a new, innovative partnership to expand access to high-quality, responsive immigration legal services across Vermont through the launch of the **Immigration Community Lawyering Initiative**.

This collaboration establishes an immigration law practice at Vermont Legal Aid for the first time in the organization's history. Through funding subgranted by VAAP, the partnership adds **two staff attorneys at VLA** who will serve immigrant communities in central and southern Vermont using a community-based lawyering model designed to meet people where they are.

The Immigration Community Lawyering Initiative centers attorneys within trusted community-based organizations, places where immigrants already gather for services, connection, and support. By embedding legal services directly in the community, the initiative strengthens access, builds trust, and removes barriers to justice.

Attorneys will provide legal representation and consultations in a wide range of immigration matters, including humanitarian, family-based, and employment-based cases. Services will include humanitarian petitions, asylum and family reunification filings, employment authorization documents (EADs), adjustment of status, naturalization, and waivers.

Attorneys will be jointly supervised by VAAP and VLA, combining deep immigration expertise with VLA's long-standing commitment to community-centered advocacy.

*"This is a big moment for Vermont's immigration safety net. One attorney joins us as a longtime Vermont legal aider with deep experience advocating alongside DHS through FEMA's disaster relief work after the Central Vermont floods and will be based in Montpelier to support community partners across the central region. The second brings years of experience as an asylum officer and refugee program professional and will serve southern Vermont from our Rutland or Springfield offices starting February 1,"* said Bessie Weiss, Interim Executive Director at Vermont Legal Aid.

*We're grateful for the community's patience as we focus on resolving complex DOC access issues and build the durable infrastructure these regions deserve,"* said Jill Martin Diaz, Executive Director at the Vermont Asylum Assistance Project. *"This historic, long-term expansion is possible because of the steadfast support of foundations, individual donors, and the Vermont Refugee Office - and we're proud to finally bring this capacity where it's been needed most."*

VAAP and VLA are proud to work together to build a stronger, more inclusive legal safety net for immigrants in Vermont and are excited to welcome new attorneys to this vital work.

*“We are incredibly thankful for this collaboration and for the community of supporters who made it possible,”* said Bessie Weiss, Interim Executive Director at Vermont Legal Aid. *“This partnership allows us to expand services, deepen impact, and ensure immigrant communities across Vermont have meaningful access to justice.”*

For more information, please contact:

Bessie Weiss  
Interim Executive Director, Vermont Legal Aid  
[bweiss@vtlegalaid.org](mailto:bweiss@vtlegalaid.org)