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Immigrant Justice Corps Announces 2015 Fellows

Expanded class of 35 committed fellows will help immigrants navigate the complex legal system to fight deportation, incarceration and separation from family

New York, NY (April 29) —Immigrant Justice Corps today announced its 2015 fellowship class, a select group of talented lawyers and recent college graduates who will represent immigrants fighting deportation and seeking citizenship. From a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist to first-generation immigrants who remember crossing the border and cleaning houses to pay for college, the fellows bring a range of unique experiences and skills to the critical legal services they will offer to immigrants.

“Many of the fellows, whether through personal or professional experiences, have already witnessed how difficult and dehumanizing our current legal system is for immigrants,” said Immigrant Justice Corps Executive Director Rachel B. Tiven. “Together with our first class, they constitute a cadre of 70 fellows working to ensure justice for immigrants.”

The class of 2015 includes 25 newly minted law school graduates and 10 recent college graduates from some of the nation’s leading schools – including Harvard, Yale, Stanford, Princeton, Berkeley, NYU and Georgetown – as well as prominent New York area institutions like CUNY, Rutgers, Cardozo and Brooklyn Law.

The cohort also speaks 10 different languages and includes six recipients of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). The fellows hail from across the U.S., growing up in states such as California, Maine, Georgia, Nevada, Oklahoma, Virginia and New York among others. Their families mirror the immigrant diversity of New York City, having emigrated from China, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Nigeria, Korea, Lebanon and many other countries.

For example, Julina Guo is a first-generation Chinese immigrant and Harvard Law School graduate whose family settled in Jackson Heights after living in Sweden. As an immigrant caseworker for Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand and through Harvard’s Immigration and Refugee Clinic, Human Rights Clinic, and Legal Aid Society, Guo gained extensive professional experience to complement her personal understanding of living the immigrant experience.

Samuel Dillon spent two decades as a news correspondent in Latin America, winning two Pulitzer Prizes and bearing witness to the violence and conditions that persuade thousands to risk their lives to leave their families and cross the border. After reading a report commissioned by Immigrant Justice Corps’ founder, Chief Judge Robert Katzmann of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, on the near impossible odds that immigrants face navigating the U.S.



legal system without a lawyer, Dillon left journalism and enrolled in Rutgers School of Law-Newark, where he participated in the Immigrant Rights Clinic.

Born in the Dominican Republic and raised in Queens Village, NY, Joan Fernandez is a graduate of Princeton and speaks four languages. Informed by his experience growing up in a low-income household – coupled with research and work opportunities in such countries as Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Nicaragua and his native country – Joan is deeply committed to opening up educational and leadership opportunities to vulnerable and underrepresented groups. At Princeton, he directed the detention center visitation, scholarship and mentorship programs of the university’s DREAM Team.

With the addition of the 2015 class, Immigrant Justice Corps doubles the number of corps members responding to the growing need for immigration legal services in New York City, Long Island, northern New Jersey, and the lower Hudson Valley. Between 50,000-100,000 families in the New York City area are in need of complex legal services that could lead them to citizenship, and tens of thousands of New Yorkers are eligible for green cards, but they need talented legal help to get them.

Launched in 2014, Immigrant Justice Corps is the country’s first fellowship program dedicated to meeting the growing need for high-quality legal assistance for immigrants. Judge Katzmann founded Immigrant Justice Corps in collaboration with the Robin Hood Foundation with seed funding from Robin Hood and the JPB Foundation. Immigrant Justice Corps is a response to the research of the Study Group on Immigrant Representation, which found that immigrants with a lawyer were nearly six times more likely to win their cases than those without. The study also revealed that immigrants often fall prey to fraudulent legal providers who charge thousands of dollars and mishandle cases with disastrous outcomes.

“By providing quality representation, this remarkable group of fellows will benefit all concerned with the administration of justice – courts and litigants alike, and most profoundly, immigrants and their families,” said Judge Katzmann. “For thousands of immigrants, lack of resources will no longer impede access to justice. Because of Immigrant Justice Corps’ fellows, immigrants with worthy claims will have a far better chance to live the American dream.”

The Fellows will begin their intensive training course on August 31, 2015 and then report to nonprofit placements throughout New York and New Jersey for the two years of their fellowship.

To view the full list of the 2015 Justice Fellows, visit <http://justicecorps.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/All-Fellows-PDF-FINAL.pdf>.

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