

How Gavin Newsom Subsidized the Migrant Invasion

The California governor has spent nearly \$1 billion on nonprofits that want to dismantle the border, “abolish ICE,” and help immigrants “living with HIV.”

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Former President Joe Biden’s administration oversaw an unprecedented wave of migration across the southwestern border of the United States. Migrants convoyed in “caravans” in hopes of overwhelming border authorities. Cartels trafficked drugs and people in droves. At some points, American authorities estimated that more than 130,000 people were crossing into the U.S. each month; arrivals came not just from Latin America but every corner of the earth.

At the height of this drama, some border states sought to stop the wave of illegal immigration on their own. Texas dispatched thousands of National Guard soldiers and spun razor-wire barriers across the desert. Arizona sent construction cranes to stack hundreds of shipping containers into a makeshift border wall near Yuma. Then-Arizona Governor Doug Ducey called it a “border crisis.” Texas Governor Greg Abbott called it an “invasion.”

California, on the other hand, welcomed the flood. In this *City Journal* investigation, we have traced the money and can reveal that Governor Gavin Newsom has granted approximately \$1 billion to an army of nonprofits that has encouraged unchecked numbers of migrants to enter the country, fought deportation orders in the courts, and led street protests against ICE. These groups often operate under the guise of “humanitarianism” or “immigration justice,” but many, as we have uncovered, are in fact left-wing activist groups that use propaganda, lawfare, and street protests to transform America’s demographics and build political power for California Democrats—all on the public dime.

This is the story of how Gavin Newsom subsidized the illegal invasion and turned a wave of desperate people into pawns in his political game.

California was ground zero for the Biden-era migrant wave. The state saw an enormous number of people cross its border, including more than 400,000 illegal immigrants between 2021 and 2023 alone. Under Newsom’s leadership, the nation’s largest “sanctuary” state granted hundreds of millions of dollars to nonprofits that have encouraged the flow of humanity across the border, variously providing migrants with transportation, shelter, social services, and legal protection.

The expenditures have been enormous. According to our review of state funding records, since Newsom took office, California has granted massive contracts for migrant-related services: more than

\$250 million to Catholic Charities; \$85 million to Jewish Family Services; \$12 million to Centro Legal de la Raza; \$23 million to the Immigration Institute of the Bay Area; and more.

Many nonprofits benefiting from these funds are shockingly radical. Al Otro Lado, a nonprofit that has been awarded more than \$2 million from California since Newsom took office, helps migrants enter the United States—hence the group’s name, “to the other side.” On social media, Al Otro Lado touts its efforts to provide “freedom of movement” to migrants. In addition to providing legal guidance, the group deploys volunteers to “remote migration routes to leave water, food, and essential supplies.”

According to its own materials, Al Otro Lado is anti-borders and openly hostile to the American nation. In one Instagram video, the group’s litigating attorney Diego Teixeira clumsily summarized the view: “I honestly just believe that there’s no reason for why we should have borders.” In another video, the group shows off books from its library, such as *Undoing Border Imperialism*, that “remind us that the U.S. is [sh*t].” The organization, which did not respond to our comment request, is currently suing the Trump administration to prohibit the government from turning away certain migrants at the border.

Other groups focus on ideological subpopulations. Oasis Legal Services, another taxpayer-funded group, has worked on helping “queer and trans immigrants navigate immigration relief and benefits.” In a recent report, the group boasted that “the odds of winning an asylum case go up to 99% for clients when they are represented by an Oasis team member.” (The group denies that it encourages the entry of immigrants.)

Adam Ryan Chang, Oasis’s executive director, believes that “homosexual audacity” is his “superpower,” and he has framed his work with the nonprofit as part of a broader left-wing campaign of “liberating” the “LGBTQ+ community.” In a recent annual report, the group highlighted its work of apparently representing migrants with a sexually transmitted disease. In 2024, the report said, “one in six of new clients is living with HIV and the rest are all at significant risk of contracting HIV.” In 2025, the proportion increased to one in five.

In response to a request for comment, Chang said people “living with HIV are not barred from entering the United States on that basis.”

Once unauthorized people have crossed the border, Governor Newsom has sought to ensure that they don’t get turned away. Since the beginning of his term, he has granted more than \$100 million to nonprofits that fight deportation orders—sometimes even for clients with criminal convictions.

One of the most prominent anti-deportation nonprofits is the Immigrant Defenders Law Center, or ImmDef, which has been awarded at least \$6.7 million in state funds since Newsom took office. The group portrays the United States as an oppressor, denouncing the Trump administration’s “white supremacist” agenda and accusing ICE of causing “terror.” ImmDef has explicitly called to “abolish the immigration prison system” and to “abolish ICE”—which, in effect, would abolish the border itself.

ImmDef, which did not respond to our comment request, is open about its radical views and ambitions. In a 2023 video, its CEO, Lindsay Toczyłowski, suggested that a Biden-era effort to restrict asylum claims was analogous to countries shunning Jewish refugees during the Holocaust. In a recent panel, she listed one of the group's primary focuses: "getting people out of ICE prison."

In keeping with that priority, ImmDef represents thousands of migrants in deportation proceedings, even working with some before they cross the border. The group's Cross-Borders Initiative provides legal consultation and social services to migrants between the border cities of Tijuana and San Diego, effectively exploiting the loopholes and technicalities of the immigration and asylum system to facilitate migration.

Once illegal immigrants are in the United States, ImmDef provides legal representation to fight deportation orders, including for those with criminal convictions. ImmDef is explicit about this: it has adopted a "merits-blind universal representation model" and provides "post-conviction relief" to illegals convicted of criminal offenses.

It's impossible to find out precisely how many illegal-alien criminals have benefited from the "merits-blind" policies of ImmDef and other taxpayer-funded groups. That's thanks to a California law that prohibits officials from disclosing defendants' immigration status in criminal court without a judge's permission. But there are alarming hints.

In 2023, the taxpayer-funded San Diego County Immigrant Legal Defense Program, which has worked with ImmDef and another state-funded group, came under scrutiny for using county funds to provide immigration legal services to 34 noncitizens convicted of crimes such as drug trafficking, money laundering, and acts "involving moral turpitude." In its most recent annual report, the program claims to have provided legal aid to 65 such individuals deemed inadmissible on "grounds related to criminal activity." In response to our comment request, the program insisted that such migrants made up a "very small share" of its annual caseload.

Last year, under pressure from state Republicans, the Democrat-led legislature restricted the spending of public immigration defense dollars on felons. But skepticism is warranted. The state has other channels by which it can protect felons from deportation, and, moreover, the law contains no reliable enforcement mechanism.

Meantime, the state's more liberal Democrats apparently want to scrap the reforms and dramatically expand legal protections for unauthorized migrants. Assemblymember Mia Bonta, wife of Attorney General Rob Bonta, is working to extend state-funded legal aid to *all illegal immigrants* fighting deportation.

The final part of Newsom's illegal immigration machine is the activist element, which is designed to resist federal authorities who would challenge California's status as a "sanctuary state."

Last summer, the conflict between President Trump and Governor Newsom came to a head. Protesters launched anti-ICE demonstrations around the country, most notably in Los Angeles, where the riots cost the city \$32 million and led to hundreds of arrests. Throughout L.A., agitators burned cars, looted stores, shut down the freeway, and threw rocks, bottles, and fireworks at law enforcement officers—all, effectively, to stop Trump from deporting illegal aliens from the United States.

Activists framed the protests as spontaneous and grassroots, but behind the scenes, a web of powerful, and sometimes publicly funded, organizations drove the narrative, and, in some cases, the “direct action” in the streets. At the center of this web is the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights Los Angeles (CHIRLA), which, since Newsom took office, has been awarded some \$110 million from California taxpayers.

CHIRLA can be described as a one-stop activist machine, with the ability to produce propaganda, engage in legal action, and—most importantly—get people into the streets. The group coordinates the L.A. Rapid Response Network, which tracks ICE raids and takes “direct action to shut down detention centers.” During the wave of protests in L.A., CHIRLA activists agitated on social media, led a street protest, and called for a “Summer of Resistance.”

At the height of the unrest, CHIRLA’s executive director, Angelica Salas, spoke at a street protest, telling crowds that ICE agents were conducting a “militarized siege” against illegal migrants. “We are going to stop Trump’s terror campaign against our community,” Salas said. “We will not stop marching. We will not stop fighting.”

Congress took notice. The House Judiciary Committee launched an investigation to determine whether CHIRLA was using public funds to “support violent criminal activity that impedes the enforcement of federal immigration law.” Senator Josh Hawley accused the group of “bankrolling civil unrest” and threatened a criminal investigation. CHIRLA denied Hawley’s accusations, claiming that its protest tactics are “rooted in non-violent advocacy, community safety, and democratic values.” (In response to our comment request, the group suggested that *City Journal* was trying to “weaponize government power and intimidate advocates like CHIRLA.”)

CHIRLA was not alone. Al Otro Lado released a statement opposing the ICE raids and standing “in solidarity” with the protesters. The Central American Resource Center of Los Angeles, an immigrant-services nonprofit, was reportedly “heavily involved” in the demonstrations. The center—which features a picture of an anti-ICE protester on its website—has been awarded \$18 million by the Newsom administration since 2019.

We reached out to the governor’s office for comment on this story. In response, a spokesperson denied that California was “‘funding criminal activity’ or bypassing public health law.”

Who benefits from this system? Certainly, the migrants who entered the United States without documentation and would like to stay. But also, and perhaps more importantly, the army of nonprofits,

lawyers, activists, and bureaucrats who keep the system running—and keep politicians like Newsom in power. The work of these groups involves not only advancing an open-borders political agenda but also maintaining the flow of funds to left-wing activists who can use the issue of immigration to achieve the broader vision of revolution.

From this perspective, the 2 million illegal migrants in California are pawns—merely the instruments of an activist class that would like to see America burn.

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