



Across Washington, Columbia Legal Services (CLS) **advocates for laws that advance social, economic and racial equity**. Using policy advocacy and litigation, **we support communities seeking justice and change**, particularly within the **systems of immigration and criminal punishment**. For more than twenty years we have said no to funding that would restrict our ability to **help people who are incarcerated or undocumented**, making CLS one of the only legal aid organizations in Washington able to serve both of these communities.

Our Why

Why do we focus on immigration and mass incarceration?

Every day, **millions of people in the United States are excluded from otherwise guaranteed rights and freedoms**

because they are immigrants without documentation, or because they have been incarcerated. In both cases, they are far more likely to be Black or Brown than the general population – and it's no mystery why.

Our immigration and criminal legal systems are deeply racist.

- The legacies of enslavement and Jim Crow live on in our policing, prosecution, conviction, sentencing, imprisonment and reentry – even in the discipline our children face in schools. Black and Brown people are targeted by law enforcement and given worse consequences at every step in the criminal legal process. Racism and mass incarceration work together to systematically exclude people of color from



We have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it.

- Michelle Alexander



the promises of society – from education to employment, housing, financing, public spaces, health care, and social safety nets.

- Beginning with the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, **our entire immigration system has been designed to exclude certain racial or religious groups** from the rights and freedoms promised in the United States. Today, as a result of immigration status, millions of people lack basic employment protections, health care, housing and public benefits, in addition to living with the constant threats of discrimination, detention and deportation.

Our Work

Some examples of our work are:

- Remediating inhumane conditions in jails, prisons, and the immigration detention center for youth and adults
- Curtailing the overuse of incarceration and financial penalties
- Challenging the laws and practices that target, exclude, and criminalize people based on their immigration status or previous justice system involvement
- Fighting to ensure full employment protections for all workers, regardless of immigration or incarceration status
- Working toward an inclusive health care system that does not exclude people based on their immigration or incarceration status
- Dismantling pipelines to prison for youth, including reforming the foster care system and juvenile detention practices

Each year, we also support or oppose **new legislation that would impact people living in poverty**, on issues such as access to public benefits, debt relief and tenants' rights.

CLS is part of the **Alliance for Equal Justice**, a network of Washington State organizations that work to coordinate strategy and delivery of civil legal aid to people and communities that experience poverty and injustice. We are conscious of the racism that is deeply embedded in our legal framework and acknowledge our own complicity in these harmful systems, while also aspiring to become an anti-racist organization.