

What is the Ohio Immigrant Alliance?

This is how the Ohio Immigrant Alliance works: supporting immigrant leadership; aligning short-term goals with values and long-term vision; and using strategic communications to advance our vision, values, and goals.

To jump through this document, follow the hyperlinks and read about our work on [individual](#) and [group](#) immigration cases to bring about individual and systemic change; [campaigns](#) to end ICE jail; the fight for [return after deportation](#); [Broken Hope](#); the [Ohio Migration Anthology](#); [anti-racism](#) in Ohio and the immigration courts; [mutual support](#) and alliance-building; and [our work in 2024](#).

When we work on individual immigration cases, we use the immediate goal of stopping the deportation as a means to reveal systemic problems with immigration policy, and provoke empathy and action among persuadable people.

At the beginning of the Trump administration, we launched a media plan to stop Jesus Lara's deportation with a front-page story in the *New York Times*, and continued through a mix of local,

national, and international media. Our narrative strategy was to introduce Jesus to the public as the loving Ohio father that we know him to be. The family lived in a rural, conservative part of the state where many people still see a "Mexican immigrant" as an outsider, and we wanted them to identify with Jesus and his kids.



We kept Jesus' story in the news using protagonist/antagonist and quest storytelling strategies. While our work with Jesus Lara did not stop him from being sent back to Mexico, it did draw Ohioans to his side and led to over \$30,000 in donations for his family. And through our work with #ReuniteUS, Jesus was able to return to the United States.

In Dayton, Fatiha Elgharib's daughters took the lead in publicizing her deportation case, and we supported them. The campaign attracted the attention of important allies in Congress; the movement to ensure [inclusion and support](#) for people with Down syndrome; and the legal community.

Today, Fatiha has a green card and hopes to reunite with her daughter Tina, who was deported. Tina is involved in our #ReuniteUS campaign and the [National Immigrant Justice Center's Chance to Come Home initiative](#). She and her family also served as a consultant on *Broken Hope*, our book project with CLASP.

When Trump restarted deportations to Mauritania, a place that still practices slavery and apartheid, we worked with Black Mauritanian immigrants who were detained, their family members, leaders, lawyers, allies, and the grassroots in a sustained media and legal campaign to stop deportations.

We told individual stories and stories about systemic abuses, making it clear that the danger of deporting people to a country that treats them as slaves or non-citizens requires a policy response, not just a case-by-case examination.

Our narrative also showcased the bravery, strength, and resilience of the immigrants and families we supported in their campaigns to be free, as well as their roots in Ohio and love of this country.

**'I do everything all Americans do.'
Home but for how long? ICE releases
Mauritanian man after 11 months**



While the Trump administration deported more people to Mauritania than all previous administrations combined, the collective struggle won some victories. Amadou Sow and Mohamed Diaby returned to their homes and loved ones after months in immigration jail. In 2019, deportations to Mauritania slowed. And, OHIA worked with a [man who was deported](#) to obtain a settlement in an abuse case.



Building off of the initial work with Black Mauritanians, and forming relationships with other immigrants who were incarcerated and deported by the Trump administration, we launched two successful campaigns to end ICE contracts at local jails and reduce ICE detention capacity in Ohio by 76%.



The efforts were instigated and sustained by brave people who spoke up from inside these jails. Lawyers and grassroots activists played essential roles, and our work with local media kept the pressure on. This [article](#) talks about our efforts to hold Morrow County officials accountable for practices that endanger public health. This [piece](#) points out that we were not giving up or believing their lies. Today, Morrow is no longer an ICE facility. Additional details about this campaign can be found [here](#).

When Morrow was no longer an option for ICE, the Butler County Jail became the destination. There, incarcerated immigrants, lawyers, loved ones, and allies also spoke out to [expose physical and racial abuse](#), resulting in a civil rights lawsuit.



This campaign began when more than fifty men detained for ICE at this jail sent a [letter](#) “To Anyone Who Will Listen” outlining serious violations of human rights. Months later, the jail’s ICE contract ended. The civil rights lawsuit remains pending.

As the country transitioned out of the dark Trump days, we launched an effort to convince the Biden administration to allow deported people to come back. Many of the same organizers and leaders involved in the individual case campaigns and decarceration work are also leaders within #ReuniteUS.



We believe that deportation is an extreme consequence for a paperwork problem. Separation from one’s family, home, job, and community is earth-shattering. The Biden administration has the power to bring deported people back to their lives in the United States, it just needs the will.

Working with a group of more than 250 people who were recently deported, #ReuniteUS educates the broader public about the problem AND the solution. Through storytelling and perspectives from people who have been through the detention and deportation machine, we are working to reach hearts and build grassroots support for bold policy change.

We landed stories in [Reuters](#), the [Columbus Dispatch](#); and other major media. Our [#ReuniteTV](#) YouTube Channel features video dispatches from deported people. [#ReuniteSpeaks](#) connects deported people to serve as paid consultants for community groups or others who could benefit from their expertise.

Most recently we [published](#) “Broken Hope: Deportation and the Road Home,” a book and issue brief co-authored with Suma Setty of the Center on Law and Social Policy (CLASP). Check it out at [reunite.us](#) and view our [digital press release](#).

Broken Hope combines information from extensive interviews with 255 people who were deported; peer-reviewed research; legal and policy analysis; and photos, videos, stories, and quotes from people who were deported and want to come home. It outlines actions for the Biden administration, Congress, the media, the pro-immigration movement, and funders to take. We created [audio summaries](#) in English, French, and Fulani to make the information widely accessible to people of varying language and literacy levels.



Mustapha Komeh is a member of the [#ReuniteUS](#) community and contributed to *Broken Hope*. He was deported to Sierra Leone after living in the U.S. for 18 years, and is desperate to return to his family. “There is nothing in this life that is more dangerous and wicked and bad than to break a family. Thanks... [for trying] to make the world hear our crying families,” he said.



As we work in rural, suburban, and urban Ohio, it's clear that many native-born Ohioans do not have personal relationships with immigrants, or people of different races and religions. This lack of direct experience often poisons their views. The Ohio Migration Anthology is a way for us to showcase Ohio's true diversity; gently teach people that migration is not a crime, but a human need as old as time; and reach new audiences.

Every two years, we publish an anthology of short stories, essays, visual art, poems, and interviews with people who have a connection to Ohio and to migration. Contributors are Black storytellers whose families migrated north during the Great Migrations, and immigrants or children of immigrants from very diverse backgrounds. The anthology's goal is to help the public see things we have in common across races, religions, and citizenship statuses. Proceeds are divided among contributors, some of whom are involved in other OHIA campaigns.

Listen to an interview with [Ideastream Public Media](#) and [pick up your copies](#) of Volume 1, “Far From Their Eyes” and Volume 2, “(Everything Is) Cells and Bodies” at [bookshop.org](#). We are currently accepting [submissions for consideration](#) for Volume 3.

At OHIA, we truly believe that the root of our dysfunctional immigration system and Congress’ failure to enact humane reform is racism. In Ohio, progressives and anti-racists need to band together to make change on a variety of social issues, outside of the white, wealthy, heterosexual, cis-gendered, able-bodied people who control power statewide.

Through the Ohio Immigrant Alliance, we raise awareness about racism in immigration law, policy, and practice. Examples include this [interview](#) with Baptist News Global; [testimony](#) filed with the House Immigration Subcommittee; [statement on Juneteenth](#); and this [newsletter](#). This [AP story](#) about #BlackLivesMatter protests was inspired by a [column](#) we wrote on Medium. And we show up for leaders of the broader decarceration and anti-police violence movements on multiple occasions.

In December 2023 OHIA, Cameroon Advocacy Network, and Mauritanian Network for Human Rights in the US convened a [panel and strategy sessions](#) at the Ford Foundation Center for Social Justice’s Festival of Human Rights entitled “Dystopia, Then Deportation.” Abdoulaye Thiaw, who we met through the Mauritanian anti-deportation campaign, offered his thoughts about human rights and racism in the U.S. immigration courts via video feed from Senegal. Following his painful, lengthy detention and deportation, Abdoulaye is a leader in our #ReuniteUS campaign and one of our two Africa-based organizers.



In 2024, after more than 18 months of research, OHIA is publishing a groundbreaking report about manifestations of racism in immigration court. This is a narrative we have been communicating for a while, while building the body of evidence. This is a tactic we use in other campaigns—create media stories that document our claims, both to shape public understanding and serve as evidence in legal cases. This story in the [Columbus Dispatch](#) is an example of that work. Follow the project at [illusionofjustice.org](#).

We take a mutual support approach to our work as an alliance of Ohio immigrants and citizens, working together to protect the dignity and rights of all individuals who choose to make Ohio their home—regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, age, ability, and citizenship status. We engage in activism and volunteerism that connects communities, including Ohioans who have been deported, to expand our voices and hold leaders accountable.



We compensate immigrants and their loved ones who advance the organization’s mission through storytelling and media interviews, or engage in advocacy or information-gathering initiatives, such as research into their experiences in immigration court.

When immigration detention was at its highest point in Ohio and the nation, we frequently ran commissary fundraisers to put money on the books of hundreds of immigrants, and paid for hotel rooms to quarantine—all through the generosity of people around the country. We make sure that people who are waging deportation prevention cases in the media have good legal counsel, and often help people obtain lawyers, get [assistance with paying filing fees](#), and more.

We partner with allied organizations across the state and nationally. Some of our closest relationships are with Cleveland Jobs With Justice, the Mauritanian Network for Human Rights in US, Cameroon Advocacy Network, IRTF, FWD.us, National Immigrant Justice Center, Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, Freedom for Immigrants, and Ohio Center for Strategic Immigration Litigation & Outreach.

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The way we work at OHIA is unique, but it feels right. We are people-centered and campaign-driven. We build each successive campaign with the people who stood up, stood out, and made a difference in the previous initiative. We take up their priorities and make them ours. And we do all of this with a very tiny budget.

In 2024, we will deliver copies of *Broken Hope* to every House and Senate office; organize meetings between people who were deported and congressional and administration staff; and continue to call on the Biden administration, Congress, immigrant advocates, the media, and funders to make return after deportation a priority.

We are also expanding the anti-racism conversation by exposing discrimination and dysfunction in the U.S. immigration courts, a system that is highly consequential to immigrants' lives but frequently overlooked. If we want immigration laws that are equitable, logical, and humane, these courts must be understood and undone.