

DePaul University
Asylum & Immigration Clinic

Eleni Wolfe-Roubatis

Immigrant Legal Defense, Executive Director

Eleni has been recognized both locally and nationally for her service to immigrant communities. In 2019 Eleni co-founded Immigrant Legal Defense (ILD) in Oakland, CA and currently serves as ILD's Executive Director. In the past three years, Eleni has been primarily responsible for growing ILD from an initial team of 7 attorney to team of 17 attorneys and 7 staff members. In starting ILD, Eleni and the other ILD co-founding attorneys launched the California State University (CSU) Immigration Services Project, a new legal services and education delivery model in collaboration with the CA Department of Social Services and nine CSU campuses in the Bay Area, Central Valley and Central Coast to provide students, staff, and faculty with free immigration legal services, including representation, legal education and outreach services and established partnerships with unified school districts for a streamlined referral system for free immigration legal services for K-12 students and families.

Eleni leads ILD's nationally recognized team of attorneys and staff in providing affirmative immigration services, detained and non-detained removal defense, individual and impact litigation and advocacy. As ILD's executive director, Eleni secures and manages funding and grant reporting for all of ILD's programs including to the State of California's Department of Social Services, Vera's NQRP program and private foundations.

Prior to co-founding ILD in 2019, Eleni grew the immigrant rights unit of Oakland's Centro Legal de la Raza from 2 attorneys to a staff of 38. During her tenure as directing attorney, which lasted from October 2013 to April 2019, Eleni secured and managed over 50 public and private foundation grants annually, including large grants from the California Department of Social Services and the Vera Institute of Justice.

After Trump's election, Eleni successfully advocated with local government and private funders to establish the Alameda County Immigration Legal & Education Partnership (ACILEP), a network that provides legal representation and rapid response services to immigrants in removal proceedings. Eleni was also instrumental in establishing the California Collaborative for Immigrant Justice (CCIJ), a collective of Bay Area legal service providers dedicated to providing high-quality free legal services to immigrants detained in the jurisdiction of the San Francisco Immigration Court. Both ACILEP and CCIJ are viewed as model programs that have greatly advanced the goal of providing universal representation to immigrants facing deportation, including those who have had contact with the criminal justice system.

Prior to relocating to California from Chicago, Eleni worked for 8 years in the National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC)'s Detention Project in positions that demanded complex immigration litigation, multidisciplinary advocacy expertise, and management of creative, cutting-edge legal programs.

Eleni has extensive experience providing direct representation for detained and non-detained individuals in removal proceedings, and has supervised, mentored and trained attorneys, paralegals and law students throughout her career. Eleni also conducts seminars for immigration and criminal defense attorneys on topics including the immigration consequences of criminal offenses for non-citizens, advanced issues in representing detained individuals and representation of individuals with mental health issues.

Eleni is regularly interviewed in the Spanish and English press on a variety of topics related to immigration law and policy. Eleni holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Johns Hopkins University, and a Juris Doctor degree from DePaul University College of Law. Eleni is a recipient of the national 2016 Michael Maggio Pro Bono Service Award for her work in establishing an innovative pro bono legal services program for detained immigrants. Her team also received the 2017 East Bay La Raza Association's Tag Team Luchadores Award for outstanding representation of unaccompanied minors and families seeking asylum. Eleni is admitted to practice in Illinois and is a member of AILA and the NLG's National Immigration Project.

What do you remember most about your time in the Clinic?

Our clients.

What lessons from the clinic do you still use today or have used in your professional career?

The importance of centering all decisions in partnership with clients.

What would you tell current or future DePaul law students about the clinic?

Getting practical client experience is the most important part of preparing to be an immigration attorney.

Clinic Participation:
2006

Graduated:
2007