

Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition

ANNUAL REPORT



2023

CIRC's Mission

Founded in 2002, CIRC is a statewide membership-based organization that advocates for all immigrants in Colorado and the United States, regardless of legal status. Our 60+ member organizations lead our coalition and seek to uplift the voices of directly impacted immigrants to create change by and for our community. CIRC seeks to build community power through organizing and leadership development within immigrant communities, winning fair and humane public policies, providing legal services and educational workshops, and implementing nonpartisan civic engagement programs.

CIRC's Approach

At the center of all we do, we ensure that immigrant voices are uplifted, amplified, and at the forefront of community change efforts by building grassroots power within immigrant communities who then drive the change they want to see. CIRC's theory of change is grounded in the premise that communities directly impacted by inequality and unjust laws should be at the forefront of movements to reform laws and create social change. CIRC has intentionally built a statewide coalition infrastructure where member groups and communities drive our campaigns, grow a strong, sustainable base and leadership, and serve as the movement's voice.



Rally outside of the GEO detention facility.

A New Era of Leadership at CIRC

In August 2023, CIRC and CIRC AF's Board of Directors appointed Gladis Ibarra and Henry Sandman as the new Co-Executive Directors of the organization. This dynamic leadership duo served as interim leaders from September 2022–August 2023, following the transition of the previous Executive Director.

Gladis Ibarra has been with the organization since 2018 and originally brought her life experience to the organization as an immigrant from Mexico. At CIRC she had the opportunity to gain experience in community organizing, managing campaigns and documenting ICE abuses. Henry Sandman has worked as a Campaign Manager, Political Operations Manager, and Managing Director at our sister organization, CIRC Action Fund over the past four years.

Together, they bring a wealth of experience and a shared commitment to empowering directly impacted immigrants.

In a testament to its resilience, CIRC today stands on solid ground—both financially and operationally. In the fall of 2022, the organization faced unprecedented challenges. However, under the interim leadership of Gladis Ibarra and Henry Sandman, the organization has executed a remarkable turnaround, emerging from uncertainty to a position of stability and strength.

"We are excited to embark on this new chapter of leadership within CIRC. Our co-executive model represents a commitment to unity, inclusivity, and resilience in the face of ongoing challenges to immigrant rights," said Gladis Ibarra.

Henry Sandman added, "Together, we will continue to foster a positive staff culture and collaborate closely with our union to strengthen our team. Our aim is to ensure that CIRC remains a powerful force in the fight for immigrant rights."

"We have undergone a remarkable transformation from where we stood just twelve months ago. Our steadfast commitment to our mission and values has propelled us forward, and we look forward to the progress that lies ahead. We are immensely grateful to our funders, partners, staff, and members, whose support has been critical throughout this transition period."



GLADIS IBARRA



HENRY SANDMAN

New Co-Executive
Directors for CIRC!



What We're Up Against

Immigrants, regardless of their legal status, face a complex web of systemic inequalities that affect all facets of their lives. The need for CIRC's existence is underpinned by the **stark reality that the U.S. immigration system is both cruel and racist** and hasn't been overhauled in over three decades.

The immigrant population, especially the undocumented, is constantly under attack and suffers the most from the lack of protection of their basic human rights, even though they represent 14% of the U.S. population. Because of the way the U.S. immigration system operates, access to quality housing, healthcare, education, employment, and the ability to live united with family members is especially difficult to obtain for immigrants.

Our mission is clear: **we are here to dismantle these deep-rooted disparities and create a more equitable Colorado for all.** Unfortunately, support for the immigrant rights movement, especially in the southwest and more rural areas, including Colorado, has not been responsive to the level of threats that we face, not only in terms of number of deportations, but also anti-immigrant rhetoric and legislation.

What is at stake isn't just making Colorado a more immigrant-friendly state, but protecting key human and civil rights and, ultimately, our democracy. **The radical right has been building power across issues and strategies** and through politics of fear and dehumanization. They have mobilized against immigrants, bodily autonomy, racial equity, queer and trans rights, climate justice, and more.

We are here to fight back and build grassroots power within immigrant communities. We recognize the intersectionality of our work with other progressive movements and we seek to bring about system changes that get us closer towards **our collective liberation.**



Community leader speaks at rally for registry.

CIRC's Programs

Access to Healthcare: Immigrants have long been excluded from access to critical health services outside of emergency Medicaid. The COVID-19 pandemic shook our communities and laid bare the dramatic and compounding impact of exclusionary policies. Since our members chose healthcare expansion as a priority in 2021, we have worked to expand Medicaid and CHP+ for children and pregnant people, including the passage of the Cover All Coloradans Act in 2022, and support community education and enrollment for the Colorado Option and OmniSalud.

In 2023, we rolled out an education campaign to ensure the public is aware of the newly passed pro-immigrant healthcare laws (OmniSalud and the Colorado Option) and has access to these new benefits. For example, in October 2023, ahead of open enrollment, we hosted a **webinar on enrolling in and understanding OmniSalud and the Colorado Option** in partnership with Colorado Consumer Health Initiative (CCHI).

In April 2023, we held a **statewide healthcare forum around access to mental healthcare**. We brought our members and community leaders together to share personal testimonies with the Department of Health and Human Services of the Biden Administration and Colorado's Members of Congress. CIRC's Healthcare Steering Committee helped design this event, recruited community members, and focused on the barriers immigrants face when accessing mental and behavioral healthcare in the state of Colorado.

Through **a statewide survey**, we collected information from the undocumented community about how the enrollment process went for OmniSalud and compiled that information for advocacy and testimonial purposes to contextualize and understand the barriers immigrants still face. **Over 30% of folks reported not using their coverage and utilizing the same community clinics they used when uninsured.** Therefore, we rolled out a healthcare literacy campaign that we are continuing into 2024 in partnership with CCHI.

We led a **whole person care social media campaign** to help educate and build the narrative around the importance of caring for your physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health for our immigrant communities. This campaign collectively reached 4,700 people.



Webinar for the immigrant community focused on OmniSalud and Enrolling in the Colorado Option.

What is the Colorado Option/OmniSalud and why does it matter?

¿Qué es la Opción de Colorado/OmniSalud y por qué es importante?

Affordable Housing

Affordable Housing is not only an issue of shelter, but also one of health and immigrant rights. The rising cost of housing in Colorado has resulted in unbearable burdens for immigrant families, with approximately one in four households dedicating over 50% of their income to rent. In addition to this, immigrants, especially newcomers, face other barriers when accessing rentals, such as lack of credit scores, social security numbers or ITIN, occupancy limits, etc. **CIRC is a part of the Colorado Homes for All Coalition (COHFA) that fights for essential rent protections** and ensures the implementation of laws prohibiting housing discrimination based on immigration status.

In 2023, we held Know Your Rights workshops in Fort Collins, Durango, and Colorado Springs around tenant rights and just cause evictions. In partnership with the Colorado Eviction Defense Project, **we organized Legal Clinics and educated immigrant communities about their housing rights, particularly in rural areas with limited legal resources.** For example, in partnership with four other just housing organizations, we organized a Housing Legal Clinic in Colorado Springs that included tenant Know Your Rights Training, free legal consultations led by housing attorneys, and a housing resource fair. We had Spanish interpreters and had about 50 attendees.

We also supported two pro-immigrant housing bills as part of the Colorado Homes for All coalition (COHFA): **Local Control of Rents and Just Cause for Evictions.** We held numerous 1:1 conversations and meetings with our members to prepare them to testify and use their personal stories to push for these bills. Unfortunately, both bills faced tough opposition and did not pass.

North Regional Organizer, Keilly, and Campaign Manager, Nayda, testify against "Show Me Your Papers" bill that would have reversed hard won protections against ICE in Colorado.



Other Policy & Advocacy Work

In addition to our two campaign priorities, access to healthcare and affordable housing, CIRC continued other policy and advocacy work to help immigrant communities mobilize, organize, and build more just institutions.

- **Advocated for and helped pass HB23-1100 Ending IGSA Contracts:** CIRC heavily advocated for this bill, which passed, and beginning on January 1, 2024, prohibits Colorado county sheriffs from entering into Intergovernmental Service Agreements (IGSA) with ICE, a contract that allows local jails to rent bed space to ICE. The bill also prohibits the state and local governments from selling land or buildings to be used to create private immigration detention centers in Colorado. We were part of the IGSA Coalition and our staff supported with testimonies. **We were the only organization to bring constituents from El Paso County & Teller County to testify and push back against a veto at a meeting convened by the Governor's office.** We also put a press release out and responded to five media inquiries regarding the passage of this bill.
- **Advocated for HB23-1147 Drivers License Test Voucher:** This bill would have created a voucher program to help low-income individuals pay for the cost of taking the in-person driver's license test at a third-party school and set a standard for how third-party providers should prioritize language access for individuals whose first language is not English. CIRC submitted organizational testimony, wrote emails to the governor, and talked with legislators about the importance of making the driver's license process equitable for rural, immigrant, and low-income communities. **Unfortunately, this bill ended up being vetoed by the Governor.**

Community leader and former board member, Pedro, speaks at rally.



Driver's Licenses for All



Community leader and board member, Adrianna, holds driver's license cutout at I-Drive 10 year anniversary press conference.

Expand Access to Driver's Licenses for All:

We successfully pushed for an increase in the number of DMV offices that offer SB251 licenses. As a result of our efforts, in June 2023, ten years after the first DMV in Colorado integrated this bill, **all 35 DMV offices now have a fully integrated program** where immigrants receive services at the same level of quality at all Colorado offices. We celebrated the 10th anniversary of the signing of bill SB251 and announced two critical updates: the opening of all 35 DMV offices to undocumented residents and rebranding the license to "Standard License" for consistency and clarity.

CIRC co-organized **a successful press event** with the DMV at History Colorado. Speakers included Governor Polis, former Representative Jesse Ulibarri, former Senator Dominick Moreno, and community representatives of the I Drive Coalition, who have benefited from the program. The evening following the press conference, the I Drive coalition hosted a **community celebration with over 150 partners**. We brought together undocumented leaders who led the fight for licenses for all starting in 2002, our legislative champions, our DMV partners, partner and coalition organizations, former staff who worked diligently on the driver's license program, and community leaders from across Colorado.



I-Drive leaders, staff, & bill sponsors at the 10 year anniversary of Licenses for All in Colorado.

Federal Advocacy

Federal Advocacy for Comprehensive Immigration Reform: We advance national policies that protect immigrant families, and we educate policymakers on the importance of humane immigration policies. We do this through the leadership development of our community members to deepen their organizing skills, contextual understanding of current and historic immigration laws and political landscape, and direct relationships to decision-makers.

- **Supported Registry Bill:** Our Federal Steering Committee led and participated in various actions such as the Rally for Registry at the State Capitol; met with Rep. Caraveo at our Denver office and asked her to support the Registry bill; advocated for and successfully got all Democrats from Congressional House (except Caraveo) to sign onto the registry bill; our members also traveled to DC and met with Congressional Representatives regarding the Registry Bill.
- **Held Numerous Meetings and Calls:** The CIRC team continued to meet regularly with our elected officials and implement accountability actions such as a CD8 accountability phone bank, Hancock accountability phone bank (migrant welcoming policies), press release at Senator Bennet's office to urge him not to dismantle asylum protections for military aid and border militarization.



Community leader, Homero, holds megaphone at rally for the registry act, outside of Senator Bennet's office.

Federal Advocacy (Continued)

Federal Advocacy for Comprehensive Immigration Reform (continued):

- **Conducted a Pilgrimage for Citizenship:**

Between December 1-4, our Federal Steering Committee walked 60 miles from Denver to Greeley, stopping at various governmental offices, including Rep. Yadira Caraveo's, along the way. The goal was to hold her accountable for refusing to sign onto the Registry bill. The amount of coverage CIRC received from the media - over 20 media hits - placed pressure on Caraveo, and we believe this momentum will continue into 2024.

- While we know that passing the Registry bill isn't feasible in the current political climate, **we continue to be community-centered and community-led and uplift the narratives that our members want to amplify as part of their actions, even if those narratives are unpopular among those in power.** Our members also understand and know this very well, but they want to emphasize that passing anything less than the Registry bill when it comes to immigration reform is unacceptable to them, their families, and the larger undocumented community.



Long-time CIRC member, Hilda, holds sign outside of Senator Hickenlooper's office during the Pilgrimage for Citizenship.



Leaders from our Federal Steering Committee who marched from Denver to Greeley for immigration reform during our Pilgrimage for Citizenship.

Direct & Legal Services

Direct Services:

In 2023, our Legal Services department organized **10 free legal workshops in Denver, Rifle, Fort Collins, Durango, Colorado Springs, Ft. Morgan, and Greeley**. Eight of these were Naturalization & DACA renewal workshops, one was specifically for DACA renewals, and one was specifically for Asylum cases. We partnered with the Barnum Rec Center, ISAAC of Northern Colorado, Denver Public Libraries, Compañeros, Immigrant Hope of Colorado Springs, Justice and Mercy Legal Aid Center (JAMLAC), American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), One Morgan County, and Cesar Chavez Cultural Center to conduct these workshops across the state.

Through these workshops, we successfully prepared 71 Naturalization applications, 69 DACA Renewal applications, completed 154 legal consultations offered by volunteer attorneys or DOJ-accredited reps, and held eight Know Your Rights presentations.

We also provided scholarships for DACA renewal to eight individuals who couldn't afford to pay the fee.



Community members attend
Citizenship workshop in Denver

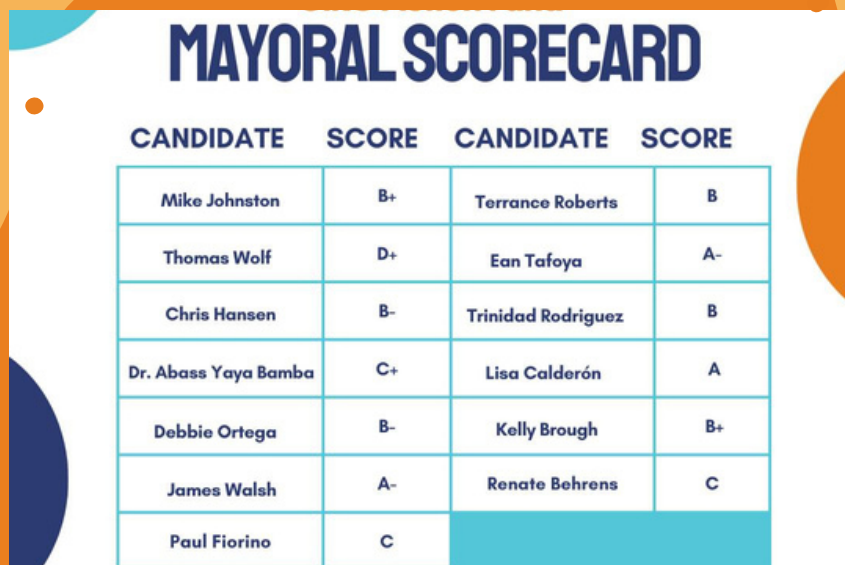


CIRC Legal Services Manager Juan David
at a Legal Services Clinic

Voter Education & Civic Engagement

Led a Voter Engagement Program: In 2023, our voter engagement program prioritized engaging and mobilizing BIPOC and immigrant communities in Adams, Arapahoe, Denver, and El Paso counties for the 2023 elections, which have historically been underrepresented in the political process and in representation by local elected officials. We knocked on 5,000 doors, encouraged voting in five social media posts, sent 125,000 texts, and received 1,100 vote commitments. While assessing our program’s overall impact on turnout is difficult to quantify, the 1,100 vote commitments we received from our voter universe of low-propensity BIPOC voters are significant in these local elections, where non-white turnout often lags behind turnout for white voters.

Mayoral Questionnaire: In 2023, we began working directly with our membership to create voter education campaigns about the immigration issues at stake in all elections. For the first time, we included direct community input on voter engagement strategy. We created and distributed a questionnaire on the important issues that impact immigrants in Denver that we sent to all mayoral candidates. This questionnaire included 20 questions and was available in both Spanish and English. With a committee of four directly impacted immigrants who live in Denver, we then evaluated the responses and graded candidates. We compiled the total score to create overall grades for candidates. We sent 100,000 texts to Denver voters and shared mayoral candidates’ responses to our questionnaire for the initial election and the runoff. We also publicized our scorecard on our website and social media accounts. We made eight posts to publicize the results and encourage turnout in the municipal elections and runoff.



MAYORAL SCORECARD

CANDIDATE	SCORE	CANDIDATE	SCORE
Mike Johnston	B+	Terrance Roberts	B
Thomas Wolf	D+	Ean Tafoya	A-
Chris Hansen	B-	Trinidad Rodriguez	B
Dr. Abass Yaya Bamba	C+	Lisa Calderón	A
Debbie Ortega	B-	Kelly Brough	B+
James Walsh	A-	Renate Behrens	C
Paul Fiorino	C		

Community-led mayoral scorecard for Denver.

Organizational Updates

In 2022–2023, our Board and staff implemented a multiphase **12-month transition plan** that successfully restructured our organization, realigned our values, stabilized our finances by increasing our operating reserves to six months, and rebuilt our infrastructure to meet the present needs of our immigrant communities and prepare for the battles ahead. This included transitioning to a **Co-Executive Director leadership model**, which was implemented in August 2023.

Specifically, we completed the following:

- **Conducted an Audit of CIRC’s History:** We worked with a consultant to review CIRC’s 20+ year history working with immigrant communities in Colorado, including how we’ve grown and developed, the current political climate we’re in, and what direction we need to take as an organization to be the most effective in carrying out our work. This process included interviews with past and present staff, board members, and our organizational members, including founding members of CIRC.
- **Developed an Organizing Model:** The work conducted by our consultant informed a new direction for our work, including an updated Organizing Model and staff structure. Our new organizing model re-prioritizes leadership development and grassroots organizing with immigrant communities across the state. It seeks to build a robust base of immigrant leaders ready to take bold, public actions to complement our efforts to work with elected officials.
- **Completed and Began Implementing our 2023–2026 Strategic Plan:** The CIRC Board and staff created a three-year strategic plan that will build strong integrated programs and capacity offerings that empower our organizational members and center the voices of the most marginalized, directly impacted communities. The completion of our joint c3/c4 2023–2026 Strategic Plan was a milestone in developing a shared vision across our entities.



CIRC 2023 Board Retreat with staff, and new and existing members.

Organizational Updates (Continued)

- **Strengthened Board Governance:** Successfully recruited and onboarded five new members, formed an advisory committee as part of the leadership transition, convened all Board members for strategic planning during the October retreat, worked with a Board consultant, attended the Colorado Nonprofit Association Training on Onboarding New Board Members, revamped onboarding process and board manual.
- **Expanded the C3 bylaws** to allow board members outside of membership to add expertise to the board, improve the organization's governance, and allow current board members to serve on both the C3 and C4 boards if they choose.
- **Ratified Union Contract:** CIRC's first union contract was ratified in November 2021. In November 2023, the union contract was renewed and updated following a collaborative bargaining process between the union and CIRC management. This new contract includes salary raises, a 4-day workweek, increased PTO, and menstrual leave. We hope that these new benefits will increase staff retention and attract talented candidates as we continue to build up our team.



Board members socializing during retreat.



Board member workshop & breakout group during retreat.

CIRC's Strategic Priorities: 2023-2026

In 2022 and 2023, the Board of Directors and Staff of both CIRC and CIRC Action Fund developed a strategic plan that sets the direction of our organizations over the next three years.

Our efforts will be guided by five strategic priorities:

1. **Build strong C3/C4 integrated programs and capacity offerings** that empower our organizational members and center the voices of the most marginalized, directly-impacted communities.
2. **Develop a shared vision for how CIRC and CIRC Action Fund will build power** for and with Colorado's most marginalized communities.
3. **Develop shared C3/C4 internal infrastructure, systems, and capacity** that allow us to operationalize our power building work across our multiple legal entities.
4. **Build a strong and healthy organizational culture** by investing in our staff and intentionally building a sustainable culture while centering equity and anti-oppression in the fabric of our organization and approach to our work.
5. **Strengthen and reimagine our governance and fundraising** to allow our legal entities to resource our long-term vision for power building in line with our values and our commitment to equity.



CIRC members in DC on May Day fighting for immigration reform.

Thank You CIRC's Supporters!



CIRC members during the annual assembly in Glenwood Springs!

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our dedicated supporters, especially those who have stood by us during a period of transition. Your trust and commitment have been a source of strength and inspiration. Your support empowers us to persist in our advocacy for immigrants and refugees in Colorado, and we deeply appreciate your dedication to our movement. Together, we will continue working tirelessly to create a more inclusive and welcoming community for all.

- CIRC Board of Directors and Staff

