

## A Brief Overview...

**An estimated 12,000 – 20,000<sup>1</sup> Haitian immigrants have resettled in Springfield, Ohio after fleeing deadly gang warfare in Haiti.** Many of them first fled to South America, where they faced racism and xenophobia so prevalently that they could not find jobs or places to live in many cases. They came to the United States to seek a safer life for themselves and their children. Almost all of Springfield's Haitian community presented themselves at a port of entry and legally entered the U.S., being offered the chance to seek asylum by the U.S. government. However, once they arrived, they faced a complex U.S. immigration system. Many of them are currently in removal (deportation) proceedings in immigration courts. Asylum applications were long, complicated, and only in English. While many Haitians are eligible to apply for work permits, those applications required large fees, and many did not know how to request fee waivers. Individual Haitians must take steps to defend their case and stay in the United States, or they will be deported to Haiti and subjected to torture and political violence.

## Our Program's Impact

### Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, Inc. (ABLE)

is a nonprofit legal services organization that provides free, high-quality legal services to low-income individuals. Our Agricultural Worker and Immigrant Rights practice group has served immigrants and native-born communities in the Springfield area for decades. When the Haitian population grew rapidly in Springfield in 2022, ABLE partnered with St. Vincent de Paul—an organization that was already running a successful community navigator program—to provide free legal clinics to help Haitians apply for work permits and for asylum. We partnered with several nonprofits to train local attorneys to provide pro bono services.

We conduct virtual and in-person information sessions where we educate Haitians on asylum and TPS applications, their rights and responsibilities in immigration court, housing rights and landlord/tenant laws, language access, and parent rights in the education system. We have also provided victim representation to a Haitian gentleman who was a victim of armed robbery, and assisted another young man in reopening his case in immigration court after he was ordered removed when he failed to attend a hearing because of car trouble.

Our clinics offer counsel and advice to Haitians on various case issues, and have referred housing and education cases to other ABLE attorneys. We continue to work with St. Vincent de Paul, who has generously donated space and office supplies, and organizes the client lists for our clinics.

Many of our clients have obtained work permits and temporary protected status, which allow them to live and work peacefully in the U.S. Our clients can now obtain driver's licenses and find stable jobs to support their families.

**In the past 2 years, ABLE has assisted over 400 Haitians** with applications for employment authorization (work permits), asylum, and Temporary Protected Status (TPS).



## Funding and Support

We were able to launch this clinic program with generous funding from the Clark County Combined Health District, Ohio Access to Justice Foundation, the Community Health Foundation of Springfield, and Springfield St. Vincent de Paul. ABLE needs additional funding to continue our clinics. We also seek funding to expand our community legal education work and to fund impact litigation and other advocacy to serve Haitian victims of hate crimes, exploitation, and civil rights violations. **As the only provider of exclusively free legal services in Springfield,** it will cost \$80,000 to continue this program for another year. We seek multiple revenue sources to meet this **vital need.**

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/09/14/us/haitian-migrants-springfield-ohio.html>