

Dear BID Members and Friends,

We want to thank all of you who attended our March 5th event on New Jersey Immigration. It was a very successful evening with close to 50 people attending and participating in a discussion on the current state of immigration on all three levels of government: federal, state and county.

For those of you who could not join us, we thought you might want to have a summary of the evening, the speakers and the content.

The forum featured three key activist groups in this area and provided us with concrete actions we can take toward resolving this human rights crisis unfolding in our own backyard. The event featured **Joanna Calle**, director of the **New Jersey Alliance for Immigrant Justice**, **Charlotte Bennett Schoen**, representing **First Friends of New Jersey and New York**, and the **Bergen County Immigration Strategy Group**.



Joanna Calle, who is this year's recipient of **ACLU/NJ Torchbearer Award for her dedicated advocacy in pursuit of greater freedoms and protections for immigrant New Jerseyans**, provided an in-depth overview of challenges facing immigrants in New Jersey, as the threat of ICE detention and deportation create strong feelings of insecurity among the undocumented. She also discussed policy initiatives that seek to protect the rights of non-citizens, such as the New Jersey Attorney General's Immigrant Trust Directive and the proposed legislation for a new immigrant-friendly process for obtaining a driver's license. The Attorney General's directive seeks to bar local police agencies from cooperating with federal ICE agents in immigration matters, a step forward to providing safe communities for immigrants throughout New Jersey. The proposed legislation (A4743/S3229) would mandate the creation of a drivers license option that is accessible to NJ residents regardless of their immigration status. More information on both initiatives can be found by clicking on the "Take Action" link

on the New Jersey Alliance for Immigrant Justice website: <https://www.njimmigrantjustice.org>.

Charlotte Bennett Schoen spoke about her experiences working as a volunteer and board member of First Friends of New Jersey and New York. First Friends provides support for people who are being held pending possible deportation at ICE detention centers in Bergen, Essex, Union and Essex Counties. Ms. Bennett Schoen shared personal experiences with visiting individuals in the detention centers and assisting others after they were released to the community. She said that the organizations needed more volunteers to assist with visiting detainees, providing post-release transportation and housing, and providing such essential resources as books, writing supplies, and calling cards. More about First Friends, including information about how to become a volunteer, can be found at <https://firstfriendsnjny.org/>.

The Bergen County Immigration Strategy Group's mission is to support policies on the local level that protect the rights of undocumented immigrants. Together with her colleague Larry White, Ms. Bennett Schoen provided information about the number of immigrants in ICE detention, the conditions at the detention centers and the implications of federal immigration enforcement funds on the county budget. She spoke of the group's efforts to increase openness and accountability around immigration issues at the county level. She encouraged audience members to become active with the Immigration Strategy Group. **Those who are interested can reach out to Larry White at lawrencewhite@gmail.com.**

We'd like to thank all our volunteers and steering committee members for taking care of every practical detail and in particular **John Curry** for all his efforts organizing this very successful forum. A special shoutout goes to our young intern, **Anya Kasubhai**, from Tenafly High School, who helped stream the event live on Facebook.

We also send **warm congratulations to Johanna Calle** for this very well deserved honor by ACLU/NJ. Johanna will receive her award during ACLU's **Lights of Liberty Awards Dinner** on May 2, at The Manor, in West Orange, NJ. If you'd like to attend, you can purchase your tickets [here](#).

We also encourage you to attend an important event on "**Understanding Systemic and Cultural Racism from Our Past to Our Present**," on March 21, 7:30 to 9:30pm, at Fairleigh Dickinson University in Hackensack, NJ organized by the **Network For Responsible Public Policy**. More details [here](#). Racism showed its ugly face again in the recent massacre in New Zealand and we

unite our voice with everyone seeking change and racial reconciliation around the world.

Don't forget to visit our page on [Facebook](#) for all the latest developments and stay tuned on our upcoming events later this spring. We are currently planning an evening on Voting Rights with the ACLU which you will not want to miss.

And, while you're at the Facebook page, please take a minute to like our [page](#). We're always looking for volunteers, so, if you have a set of skills you can share with us, please reach out.

We wish you all Happy Spring.

Warm regards,

Lori Sackler, BID President
Alex Spyridaki, BID Vice President