



Maria Kutnick Leads Chicago Office Response to Migrant Crisis

OCTOBER 25, 2023

When Chicago Partner **Kimball Anderson** saw the crowds of migrants—including women and small children—gathered in the searing heat outside the police station at Larabee and Division, he felt compelled to help. The migrants had crossed the southern border and were loaded onto buses, and sometimes planes, bound for Chicago. Many of them had no idea where they were being sent and some had been separated from a spouse or partner detained by border patrol agents. More than 18,000 migrants, mostly Venezuelan, have arrived in Chicago since August 2022.

Unprepared for this massive influx, the City of Chicago is temporarily housing newly arrived migrants in police stations across the city before moving them into shelters as space becomes available. The migrants camp out in front of the stations in tents, on mattresses, and in sleeping bags on the sidewalk with their small pile of belongings next to them. The vast majority of these individuals do not speak English and have little to no information on the immigration process in the United States. On October 6, 2023, *The New York Times* reported on the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Chicago. [You can read the story here.](#)

WINSTON RESPONDS

Upon seeing the crowd of migrants camped out in front of the police station, Kimball contacted Pro Bono Counsel and career Immigration attorney **Maria Kutnick**, who was already a member of a steering committee organized by the Chicago Bar Foundation to create a unified legal response from stakeholders across the city.

Maria immediately jumped in to fill the legal void created by this humanitarian crisis. The plight of these migrants is especially near and dear to Maria's heart because both of her parents migrated to the United States from South and Central America and became U.S. citizens when immigration amnesty was offered in the 1980s.

As a first step, Maria, Kimball, **Matt DalSanto**, and Pro Bono Coordinator **Rubi Conchas Lopez** spent a Saturday in early August meeting with the individuals living at the Larabee and Division police station to assess their legal needs.

Maria then mobilized Winston volunteers to participate in one of the first migrant legal screening clinics, an effort organized by the Legal Aid Society. One individual our team met with during this clinic had only four days left until he would no longer be eligible to file for asylum. The Winston volunteers who participated included **Chris**

Dombkowski, April Doxey, Greg Gartland, Maria Kutnick, Rubi Conchas Lopez, Lena Marquez, and Greg McConnell.

Understanding that a more effective solution for meeting the needs of a larger group of migrants would be to meet with them where they live, Maria tapped Winston’s AV team to help her conduct a pop-up “Know Your Rights Clinic” at a church near the police station. **Dan Letchinger**, Winston’s AV collaboration technician, provided onsite AV support while Kimball, Maria, Lena, and Rubi provided the migrants with legal information and helped register them for upcoming pro se asylum workshops.

While Maria has rallied Winston attorneys and professional staff to provide the legal support these migrants dearly need, Kimball Anderson and Matt DalSanto have repeatedly used their own funds to provide them with water, food, clothing, and other essentials.

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