



Improving Outcomes in Immigration Court

BY JANE WILSON

It should have been a snap, says Professor Maureen Sweeney, an award-winning immigration lawyer and longtime director of Maryland Carey Law's Immigration Clinic.

The client, a Syrian national, had an approved immigration petition as the husband of a U.S. citizen. A year ago, a routine interview at the U.S. Consulate would have been sufficient to get him an immigrant visa and reunite him with his wife, well before the birth of their son who was due in May 2017, Sweeney says.

Instead, Sweeney and her student, recent graduate Lea Uradu '17, spent almost a month working intensely to achieve that outcome — just days before the baby was born.

As the federal government's new immigration policies move through the courts and enforcement increases dramatically, the demand for immigrant legal services has increased, according to Sweeney. With funding support from the University of Maryland, Baltimore's President's Office and private philanthropy, Sweeney is now managing a two-year pilot project that will allow the Immigration Clinic to serve more clients. The project also allows the clinic to participate in a

larger effort to provide "universal coverage" to every detained immigrant facing deportation in Baltimore.

"A lawyer makes the difference," argues Sweeney, citing a March 2017 study from the Center for Popular Democracy, which found immigrants' chances of winning their cases increased by 1,000 percent in New York after it became the first U.S. city to guarantee representation in Immigration Court. In Baltimore, detained immigrants without a lawyer currently have only a seven percent chance of obtaining relief — odds that quadruple with representation, the same study finds. "The evidence is clear," according to researcher Maggie Corser, the study's author. "If Baltimore were to institute a universal access to counsel program, successful case outcomes for immigrants would likely increase dramatically, as was seen in New York City."

As part of the pilot project, the Immigration Clinic has added a second lawyer to supervise students and work with the Maryland Access to Justice Commission, the Capital Area Immigrant Rights Coalition in Washington, D.C., and other nonprofits committed to working toward universal representation in immigration court. ♦



Lea Uradu '17 and Professor Maureen Sweeney, director of the Immigration Clinic, stand with their clinic client who was reunited with his wife days before