

## Introducing the South Asian Legal Defense Fund

### How We Got Here

Since the earliest waves of South Asian immigration to the United States, our community has encountered unique challenges and injustices on the path toward equality. From the [Bellingham, Washington riots of 1907](#), when a mob of 400–500 white members of the Asiatic Exclusion League attacked Sikh immigrants' homes to exclude them from working at the local lumber mills, to the emergence of the [Dotbusters gang in 1980s New Jersey](#), the nature and rhetoric surrounding these challenges have shifted and evolved. However, the realities of racism and the infringement of civil rights have remained persistent.

As time progressed, the narrative of South Asian Americans has incorporated more presumptions, particularly with the emergence of the model minority myth. This myth, while seemingly positive on the surface, has served to erase the very real discrimination and struggles faced by our community today. [The aftermath of 9/11](#) further exacerbated these issues, with brown-skinned individuals becoming targets of heightened discrimination and prejudice and institutionalized Islamophobia continuing to manifest as hate crimes, the curtailment of First Amendment rights, and bullying in schools.

### Empowering Our Community through Legal Defense

In light of these persistent challenges, we are proud to announce the establishment of the South Asian Legal Defense Fund. Our mission is clear: to combat discrimination and injustice faced by South Asian Americans through using law, narrative, and community to defend and advance the civil rights of South Asian Americans.

### Policy Areas of Focus:

1. Asylum Seekers and Refugees: Safeguarding the dignity and rights of individuals and families in detention centers as well as their speedy and equitable resettlement.
2. Law Enforcement Accountability: Increased police accountability and transparency in cases of wrongful death and misconduct.
3. Affirmative Action: Aligning with Asian American civil rights organizations to Defend Diversity.
4. On Capitol Hill: Advocacy for the passage of the South Asian Heart Health Awareness and Research Act.
5. Voter Support: Voting Integrity and acting as a watchdog to respond to South Asian voter suppression.

## Empowering the Next Generation

Central to our mission is the empowerment of youth within the South Asian American community. We believe in nurturing the next generation of leaders and advocates, encouraging them to pursue careers in law and social justice. By fostering a sense of agency and activism among our youth, we can ensure a brighter future for our community.

## Why New York City?

New York City serves as the ideal starting point for our work. As one of the most diverse and vibrant cities in the world, it is home to a large and thriving South Asian American population. By establishing our presence here, we can directly engage with those in need of support and leverage the city's resources to amplify our impact.

## Updates & Getting Involved

Pre-fundraising and with a team of only volunteers, we have:

- Joined a national policy campaign with [AAPI Data's #PowerInNumbers](#) initiative
- Partnered with [Khan's Tutorial](#) to begin Know-Your-Rights trainings, which will be delivered to all 8 of their branches throughout NYC
- Started recruiting for our Board of Advisors
- Finalized our first grant application
- Become an official nonprofit partner to producer Sara Chishti's upcoming documentary about the [plight of indebted yellow cab medallion owners](#), with our Executive Director Shivani Parikh joining their team as an impact producer.

The journey towards equality and justice is ongoing, but with your support, we can make meaningful strides forward. Whether through volunteering, donations, or spreading awareness, there are countless ways to get involved in our mission. Together, we can build a more equitable future for all South Asian Americans. Please follow us on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [LinkedIn](#), and encourage others to sign up for [our mailing list](#)!

In solidarity,

The South Asian Legal Defense Fund Team