

Resolution in support of an Immigrant Resource Center

Whereas it is more necessary than ever for people to come together across race, legal status, and class to ensure no one is blocked from their basic human rights to safety, dignity, and belonging; and

Whereas immigrants, especially immigrants of color, are not being provided equal access to safe housing, living-wage jobs, healthcare, and full civic and community participation; and

Whereas when it comes to basic human rights, government inaction and unjustified delay effectively deny those rights; and

Whereas many disasters hit immigrant communities disproportionately hard, including recent flooding, the pandemic, and growing housing injustice; and

Whereas those vulnerabilities are made worse by unequal access to local government resources, including services, funding, and representation, due to inadequate or nonexistent language accommodation, as well as general isolation from and non-accountability to immigrant communities; and

Whereas many U.S. cities already fund immigrant resource centers, including Seattle¹, Buffalo², Denver³, Los Angeles⁴, San Francisco⁵, Boston⁶, Chicago⁷, New York⁸, Nashville⁹, San Antonio¹⁰, Houston¹¹, Detroit¹², Philadelphia¹³, and Baltimore¹⁴; and

Whereas, organizations such as Cities for Action¹⁵, a network of over 120 cities, offers support and guidance on best practices for municipalities seeking to expand services for immigrant communities; and

Whereas the City of Bellingham Mayor has expressed support for an Immigrant Resource Center and the Bellingham City Council has voted unanimously to request that the Mayor's Office develop a proposal to this end; and

Whereas directly affected community members and allies advocated for this first step and expect timely and accountable follow-through; and

Whereas the City of Bellingham has 10.5 million dollars in unspent American Rescue Plan funds¹⁶ and historically large budget reserves;

Now, therefore, be it RESOLVED, that the Whatcom Democrats call on the Bellingham Mayor and City Council to establish a city and wherever possible, other government agency-funded Immigrant Resource Center with mandates determined by impacted community members of the Immigration Advisory Board, in consultation with impacted communities, with the following provisions:

- that any ordinance or executive order establishing an Immigrant Resource Center shall create an oversight role for the Immigration Advisory Board;

- that the establishment of an Immigrant Resource Center shall include measurable goals for the organization and mandate an annual report to, and quarterly meetings with, the City of Bellingham Immigration Advisory Board;
- that the establishment of an Immigrant Resource Center shall provide funding for center staff including a Director whose hiring selection includes input and review by the Immigration and Advisory Board throughout the recruitment and hiring process. The Director will provide reports to the Immigration Advisory Board along with City Council and the Mayor.
- that the Immigrant Resource Center shall have the ability to expand its activities and offerings to flexibly meet the real-world needs of local immigrant communities,
- that the Immigrant Resource Center shall have a mandate to create accessible and frequent opportunities for community input on the direction of the agency.

Adopted by unanimous vote (58 in favor, none opposed, one abstention) at the September 24, 2022 General Membership Meeting.

¹ <https://www.seattle.gov/iandraffairs>

² <https://www.buffalo.edu/immigration-services.html>

³ <https://denverfoundation.org/denver-immigrant-legal-services-fund/>

⁴ <https://oia.lacounty.gov/services/>

⁵ <https://sf.gov/get-immigration-legal-help>

⁶ <https://www.boston.gov/departments/immigrant-advancement>

⁷ https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/mayor/supp_info/office-of-new-americans/resource-flyers-for-new-americans.html

⁸ <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/immigrants/index.page>

⁹ <https://library.nashville.gov/services/services-immigrants-and-refugees>

¹⁰ <https://www.sanantonio.gov/humanservices/ImmigrationServices>

¹¹ <https://www.houstontx.gov/na/services/english.pdf>

¹² <https://detroitmi.gov/government/mayors-office/office-immigrant-affairs>

¹³ <https://www.phila.gov/departments/office-of-immigrant-affairs/>

¹⁴ <https://mima.baltimorecity.gov/>

¹⁵ <https://www.citiesforaction.us/>

¹⁶ <http://whatcomwatch.org/index.php/article/bellingham-city-council-68/>