



BOARD/COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

Commission on Immigrant Affairs

Recommendation Number: 20160121-004C

Regarding "Department of Homeland Security Immigration Raids"

WHEREAS, the City of Austin is a part of Welcoming America, formally declared itself a Welcoming City on September 19, 2013, and engaged all relevant sectors, including government, business, and non-profits, in the Austin Welcoming City Initiative in 2015 to work together to create a welcoming community climate that supports long-term integration; a commitment to institutionalizing strategies that ensure the ongoing inclusion and long-term economic and social integration of newcomers; and engaging newcomers and long-time residents to find common ground and shared leadership in order to craft a community-driven vision for Austin as a Welcoming Community; and

WHEREAS, the City of Austin is a member of Cities United for Immigration Action, and as such stands in support of stronger cities through immigration action and is guided by the following principles:

- 1 Create an inclusive, humane and timely path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, and secure resources to support local implementation.
- 2 Reunite families by eliminating visa backlogs in the family immigration system.
- 3 Support local economies by facilitating immigration that will help U.S. businesses grow, stay competitive, and create more opportunity for all.
- 4 Protect workplace rights for workers regardless of immigration status, and uphold labor standards for all.
- 5 Support sensible local policies and community policing, and enforcement that prioritizes serious public safety threats.
- 6 Ensure due process protections for immigrants facing removal from the United States, including humane alternatives to detention, access to counsel and judicial review, and judicial discretion for humanitarian cases.
- 7 Advocate for and allocate necessary resources for economic, social and civic integration programs that empower immigrants and strengthen their communities.
- 8 Work to reduce financial, language, and informational barriers to citizenship.
- 9 Increase protections for and minimize obstacles to refugees and asylum seekers fleeing various forms of crisis.
- 10 Commit to secure necessary resources to ensure the successful resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers into local communities.

WHEREAS, the Commission on Immigrant Affairs exist to advise the city council on issues of common concern to immigrants, particularly in the areas of health and human

services, education, and the demographic makeup of the Austin immigrant community;
and

WHEREAS, there have been troubling widespread recent reports of federal immigration raids as a result of the issuance of new guidelines which included a focus on border security and the removal of those apprehended at the border or those who came here illegally after January 1, 2014; and

WHEREAS, these raids primarily target families of adults and children from Central America; and

WHEREAS, an estimated 90% of these families have bona fide claims for humanitarian protection and many of those being rounded up and sent to jail-like detention centers for deportation are women and children fleeing gender-based violence; and

WHEREAS, the victims of these traumatizing raids often missed their court dates because they were given improper or inadequate instructions on the asylum process by DHS or its contractors; and

WHEREAS, others performed poorly in hearings due to lack of legal representation, which has been proven to be the single most important factor in predicting success in a request for asylum; and

WHEREAS, according to Syracuse University, 73% of mothers facing deportation never find a lawyer, without which less than 1% will find protection in the United States; and

WHEREAS, 40% of immigrants live in mixed status households whereby at least one household member is a U.S. Citizen, thus increasing U.S. Citizen susceptibility to increased feelings of instability and growing isolation, fear, and psychological effects such as depression; and

WHEREAS, immigration raids undermine immigrant resident trust in local authorities and perpetuate an environment of fear and insecurity which ultimately hinders the effectiveness of community policing.

THEREFORE, be it:

RECOMMENDED, that the City of Austin continue to exemplify the best of the United States as a welcoming nation that protects individuals who are fleeing persecution and violence;

RECOMMENDED, that the City of Austin continue to closely monitor this situation as it unfolds, and work with our community partners to ensure that our residents have access to city services and reputable legal service providers;

RECOMMENDED, that City of Austin police officers, school district employees and other city workers do not and will not act to enforce federal immigration law;

RECOMMENDED, that City of Austin representatives act in support of all residents regardless of documentation and immigration status;

RECOMMENDED, that the City of Austin work closely with our community-based nonprofit and faith-based partners to develop ongoing 'know your rights' training around the county, increase pro bono legal support, and develop and distribute educational materials as part of a bilingual public information campaign;

RECOMMENDED, that the City of Austin follow the lead of other Cities United For Immigration Action member cities and urge Department of Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson to remember that many of the families who have recently moved to our city are fleeing some of the most violent countries in the Western Hemisphere and that the conditions of these countries merit a compassionate and appropriate response.

PASSED by the Commission on Immigrant Affairs on January 21, 2016.

Unanimously approved by the Commission on Immigrant Affairs on an 8-0 vote with Commissioners Kevin Countie, Jose Gamboa, and Rosalia Austin absent.

Attest:

Connie H. Gonzales, Staff Liaison

