



Commission on Immigrant Affairs

Recommendation Number: 20190429-5AIII: Fund legal services for low-income immigrants

Brief Title

Legal Services for low-income immigrants seeking immigration legal assistance

Describe the Issue

Immigrants in Austin are facing a rising demand for low-cost and pro bono immigration legal services. We have heard from both immigrants in our community and from legal service providers that all make clear the demand for these services far outweighs the resources available. In recent years, the city has provided funding for deportation legal support and for consultations. This is appreciated, but it is not nearly enough to support the rising demand. Members of the community have told the commission that since the funds are limited, people are turned away.

Furthermore, the legal needs of the immigrant population in our community go beyond legal services related to deportation. There is also a need for investment in citizenship clinics, immigration relief options such as asylum, T Visas, and U visas, general immigration legal clinics for issues unrelated to deportation, "Know your rights" clinics focused on immigration matters, adjustment applications for refugees and other legal services specific to refugees, and legal services for immigrant vets. Non-profit agencies have seen an increase in asylees and refugees seeking pro bono assistance with applications for adjustment of status (green card applications), because the federal government has cut funding. In addition, non-profit agencies assist homeless veterans with assistance in replacing immigration and naturalization documents, and do not have funding to do that.

Data

Since 2017, immigration-related arrests have skyrocketed to over 436 arrests per day, 139 arrests per day for people without criminal records. Austin has been a target of ICE and in 2017, our community was Number 1 in arrests of immigrants with no criminal record ("Austin No. 1 in US – for noncriminals arrested in ICE raids," Austin American Statesman, March 9, 2017). Many in our community are still in legal proceedings related to those raids. In addition, immigrants of all status types face uncertainty, anxiety, and fear due to heightened scrutiny and everchanging policies. Austin's immigration service providers cannot support our rising needs alone, nor can they expand their programs to meet the needs of the community without additional funding. As immigration rules and policies rapidly change, it is essential to provide the immigrant community with quality advice and service.

Recommendation to Address Issue (increase efficiency, effectiveness, and equity):

We request the City of Austin increase its current funding dedicated to low-income immigrants to at least \$500,000 to address the rising number of individuals seeking services for removal defense, immigration relief filings, citizenship and naturalization services, and other immigration legal needs.

Strategic Outcome areas addressed by our recommendation:

Strategic Outcome 1:

Government that Works for All
Satisfaction with City Services
Public Engagement and Participation
Equity of City Programs and Resource Allocation

Strategic Outcome 2:

Safety
Fair Administration of Justice
Public compliance with laws and regulations

Strategic Outcome 3:

Cultural and Lifelong Learning
Appreciation, respect, and welcoming of all people and cultures

Date of Approval: 4/29/19

Record of the vote: Unanimous on an 8-0 vote, Glenn Rosales, Samuel Adair, Walid Kobrosly, and Nasario Jaimes not present

Attest: Connie H. Gonzales