



**COMMISSION ON IMMIGRANT AFFAIRS  
REGULAR MEETING  
MINUTES  
1, 8, 2022**

**The Commission on Immigrant Affairs convened in a regular called meeting on 1, August, 2022, at Austin City Hall Room 1101, 301 W 2nd Street in Austin, Texas.**

**Chair Juan called the Commission on Immigrant Affairs Meeting to order at 6:43 p.m.**

**Board Members/Commissioners in Attendance:**

*Juan Vences-Benitez, Chair  
Karen Crawford*

**Board Members/Commissioners in Attendance Remotely:**

<i>Krystal Gomez, Vice-Chair</i>	<i>Aditi Joshi</i>	<i>Nicole Merritt</i>
<i>Adrian De La Rosa</i>	<i>Rennison Lalgee</i>	<i>Joseph Ramirez-Hernandez</i>

**PUBLIC COMMUNICATION: GENERAL**

**none**

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

1. Approve the minutes of the Commission on Immigrant Affairs Regular Meeting on June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

**The minutes from the meeting of 6/1/2022 were approved on Krystal's motion, Sara's second on a 7-0 vote. Sara Becker and Kate Lincoln-Goldfinch were absent.**

**DISCUSSION ITEMS**

2. Discussion on Commissioner Glenn Rosales' passing - Juan
  - a. The commissioners would like to send their condolences and do something to honor Glenn Rosales and acknowledge his contribution to the city. Nicole offered to coordinate gathering the funds from commissioners to send flowers. Juan will reach out to Council Member Kitchen's office to see if they are planning anything. Juan will also reach out to City Council to see if they will make a statement acknowledging his contribution to the city.
3. Discussion of FY 2022-2023 Budget and recommendations made by the Commission on Immigrant Affairs - Karen

- a. The City is recovering well and there is some room in the budget. The Commission received feedback from departments on the Commission's recommendations. PARD and the Refugee Clinic agreed with the recommendations, but would need more money to accomplish them. Increase in legal services was funded, and given additional funding this year. Immigrant Affairs Office also requires more money to accomplish the recommendations.
  - b. The Joint Inclusion Committee's recommendation for a Quality of Life Study and it was approved and funded. The Commission on Immigrant Affairs will receive a Quality of Life Study. Five commissions have never had a Quality of Life study, so those will get a baseline study. The next step is the planning process, which will begin with a workshop in August.
4. Discussion and updates on Enhanced Library Cards - Rocio
  - a. There was a townhall meeting today hosted by Councilmember Fuentes' Office that included representatives from different non-profit organizations that serve immigrant communities. Many of them discussed the process they followed to create their enhanced library card programs. Councilmember Fuentes' Office is attempting to have the enhanced library card funded through a budget recommendation, so City Council will have to vote to approve the resolution. The goal is based on what is feasible financially to offer this program at several library locations to reach as many people as possible. San Antonio has had about 1000 people sign up for the enhanced library card so far. It was brought up in the townhall to request for Councilmember Fuentes to explicitly state that the Equity Office will be in charge of next steps of planning and rolling out the library card.
    - i. Money was previously earmarked for this project, but it was used for the report by Dr. Wasem at the LBJ School. With this recommendation, funds being co-opted for other studies or reports should not be a problem as several cities have successfully implemented this program, so further research is unnecessary. The recommendation is for a pilot program.
    - ii. Law enforcement buy-in has been an obstacle for other cities. San Antonio and San Marcos both struggled with this and had to work with their law enforcement to overcome this. APD has shown openness thus far. Department buy-in is also important as they sometimes have federal requirements for ID's for their programs or other issues.
    - iii. Juan will email Sophia about the Commission being included in these discussions by Councilmembers as the Commission has done years of research on the enhanced library card programs that would be beneficial to them.
    - iv. Austin Public Libraries will receive the money. The Library Commission also did a resolution on July 25<sup>th</sup> agreeing with the enhanced library card.

- v. There are several concerns about the enhanced library cards, including whether the card could be used to target people and how the funding will actually be used.
  - vi. To pass any sort of resolution to ensure their concerns are addressed before Council votes on the budget on August 17<sup>th</sup>. If Juan can get answers from Sophia this week, Sarah will email everyone about a Special Called Meeting next week in order to pass a recommendation.
- 5. 2022-2023 Goals Discussion for the Commission on Immigrant Affairs - Juan
  - a. Juan created a document for goal setting for the Commission based on five “buckets” that were previously identified as priority by Dr. Wasem’s study.
    - i. Leadership & Governance: Establish an office for immigration affairs within Austin or in conjunction with Travis County. Would also allow oversight and accountability over programs.
      - 1. Expanding the immigrant affairs office, expanding Rocio’s role in the Equity Office, getting a Quality of Life Study, and exploring transition into a Quality of Life Commission.
      - 2. Possibly becoming a “Welcoming City.” Austin was not chosen as a pilot city, but could join later.
      - 3. Funding is the biggest hurdle.
    - ii. Civic Engagement and Inclusivity: Supporting naturalization and encouraging civic participation.
      - 1. Establishing an enhanced library card; reform/monitor U-Visa process with APD, District Attorney, County Attorney, Travis County Sheriff’s Department; supporting naturalization efforts and ceremonies
      - 2. Listening sessions with the communities.
      - 3. The U-Visa process is massive and spans several groups and geographic features, so we may need to start with just APD since it is a city department that we have already worked with a lot. We want to advocate for data-driven best practices.
      - 4. Austin Public Libraries has begun some in-person events with American Gateways and the community. They could be a good outreach possibility for engagement and providing services.
    - iii. Economic Prosperity and Job Growth – remedy low wages, such as construction, and increase workforce development and business development for immigrant communities.
      - 1. Can the City help people transition into the workforce based on their education from their home country by facilitating their licensing or certification? There are programs that already do this, but they are large bureaucracies that are difficult to find. Accurate translations are also an issue.

2. There was a townhall for increasing accessibility for the City's training and development programs, such as programs to help people start a small business. They were limited in language, hours, and locations.
  3. Education and outreach to share what programs exist for them, such as TASFA. There is a lack of standardization of information given to undocumented people, many school counselors do not even know about how the TASFA process works. There are a lot of misconceptions around education.
  4. There is a lack of education around starting a small business that needs addressed.
  5. The Economic Development Department would be a helpful connection to build a path for immigrants as Austin focuses on business growth. Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board has a lot of resources that are underutilized, and the Small Business Development Corporation has a lot of resources as well.
  6. Many immigrants do not understand American financial systems and they end up in a net zero economy. They do not have the resources to understand the system.
  7. UT is working on creating a student resource center for undocumented people/students
- iv. Livability – Making Austin a livable city for immigrants
1. Engage with Project Connect and the Anti-Displacement Work; affordable housing; rental assistance; collaboration with BASTA
  2. Mobile home communities/cooperatives a potential option
  3. NACA could be another good program, as well as the Down Payment Assistance Program
  4. Utility set-up, understanding and paying the bills, and language access is a common concern.
  5. Natural hazard preparedness, such as extreme heat and flooding. Resilience hubs are focusing on this as well as the Climate Equity Plan.
- v. Community Resilience – Identify risk factors and at-risk areas of the city, locate assets and resources, and establish community hubs
1. Austin Public Library expansion to immigrant community; Dual Language Camps; Refugee Health Clinics
  2. Resilience hubs are currently being developed by the Equity Office.
  3. AARC and ARC could also be good partners.
  4. Identify food deserts, the Climate Equity Plan looks into food deserts and could be a good opportunity for a presentation to the commission.

5. Access to health services and legal services, Worker's Defense Project might be a good opportunity.
  6. APH established their Community Health Worker Hub which might be a good opportunity.
- b. Next steps are to finalize goals and then break into workgroups around the topics.

### **DISCUSSION AND ACTION ITEMS**

6. Discussion and possible action on Joint Inclusion Committee representative for the Commission on Immigrant Affairs
  - a. Karen's term expires December 31<sup>st</sup> and does not know if her term will be extended. She is the Vice-Chair and Krystal is the alternate. The meetings are the fourth Wednesday at 3-5pm. It takes several months to be approved so wanted to start the discussion early.
    - i. Krystal said she can step in if needed if Karen's term ends, but will also step aside if someone else is very interested.

### **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

**Finalizing FY23 Goals and assigning Work Groups – Juan, Krystal**

**Joint Inclusion Committee representative for the Commission on Immigrant Affairs – Juan, Karen**

**Update of Resilience Hub – Karen, Joseph**

**Reaching out to Travis County Sheriffs about U-Cert policy – Krystal, Juan**

**Quality of Life Study – Karen, Juan**

**Calling Special Meeting – Juan, Krystal**

### **ADJOURNMENT**

**Chair Juan adjourned the meeting at 8:26p.m. without objection.**

**The minutes were approved at the 09/06/2022 meeting on Nicole's motion, Karen second on a 7-0 vote.**