



**COMMISSION ON IMMIGRANT AFFAIRS
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
FEBRUARY 5, 2024 AT 6:30PM
AUSTIN, TEXAS**

The COMMISSION ON IMMIGRANT AFFAIRS convened in a REGULAR meeting on 05, FEBRUARY, 2024 at 301 W. 2ND ST. in Austin, Texas.

Chair Melissa Ortega called the COMMISSION ON IMMIGRANT AFFAIRS_Meeting to order at 6:53 p.m.

Board Members/Commissioners in Attendance: *Chair Melissa Ortega, Rennison Lalgee*

Board Members/Commissioners in Attendance Remotely: *Vice Chair Victor Martinez, Aditi Joshi, Jose Caceres, Adrian De La Rosa, Virginia Badillo*

Board Members/Commissioners not in Attendance:
Anjum Malik, Adnan Suleiman, Fang Fang

PUBLIC COMMUNICATION: GENERAL

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. Approve the minutes of the COMMISSION ON IMMIGRANT AFFAIRS REGULAR MEETING on 8/7/2023.

The minutes from the meeting of (8/7/2023) were approved on ADITI JOSHI'S motion, VICTOR MARTINEZ'S second on a (7-0) vote. (COMMISSIONERS ANJUM MALIK, ADNAN SULEIMAN, FANG FANG absent)

2. Approve the minutes of the COMMISSION ON IMMIGRANT AFFAIRS REGULAR MEETING on 11/6/2023 – amendment of 6-1 vote for Chair, 0-1 Vice Chair

The minutes for the regular meeting of 11/6/2023 were approved with the following amendments on Victor Martinez's motion, Melissa Ortega's second on a 7-0 vote. The amendments were: (2nd page in "Discussion and Action Items", 1st paragraph, 3rd line, starting with the 8th word regarding the vote count.) (COMMISSIONERS ANJUM MALIK, ADNAN SULEIMAN, FANG FANG absent)

STAFF BRIEFINGS

3. Overview of Certified Welcoming America, the application process, and our current status with respect to that work: Presentation by Rocio Villalobos.

Welcoming America certification assesses cities and the criteria used to declare a city as a certified welcoming city or not. Having this certification helps to uplift voices in different communities and how we support immigrants in Austin. This is an opportunity to look at what is working and what needs improvement. The rating is from a 1 star status to a 5 star status for municipalities. Currently City of Austin is being considered for 2 star welcoming city. Rocio discusses the importance of elevating this work in terms of leadership to make a commitment to immigrant communities and ways to be inclusive on the way to becoming a welcoming city.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

4. Introduction and welcome of new Commissioners.
5. Presentation by Edna American Gateways regarding updates on their work in the community.

Austin Public Health contracts their work and they have had a great collaboration with them. This is the last year of services of this contract with a 6 month extension to provide immigration legal services. They are waiting to hear about the RFP to be released in the Spring. They also have a contract for Pro Se representation for those primarily in deportation proceedings. These are the 3 areas of work:

- a. Outreach/education – legal clinics and comm education, “Know your rights” – working with Commissioner Vanessa Fuentes to do a community-wide session.
- b. Pro Se legal representation – help with translation, to understand the process
- c. Full legal representation – most time and labor intensive portion of work and they provide representation for the entirety of their cases.

They solely focus on humanitarian forms of relief and all clients are at or below 200 percent poverty level. They meet only 20-25% of the needs. They have an increase in their caseload and are experiencing more cases in need of services. They have empowered over 10,000 individuals with legal information at 3 detention courts.

They began citizenship clinics in partnership the Equity Office, Rocio Villalobos and AFL-CIO. They have 2 upcoming clinics in May and October of 2024. American Gateway received funding for pro-se assistance and is hoping that the City and the Commission on Immigrant Affairs will enroll their contract for the it into APH budget for overall immigration legal services. They are requesting for the City and the Commission to advocate to include a immigration legal service budget for the growing needs in the City, not just for their own programs but overall.

Current annual budget is at \$420,000 and does not include \$70,000 pro se legal representation program and both come from Austin Public Health department. They would like to see advocacy

and push for enhanced library cards in different populations of color and also a unified resource center where people can get information about city services especially if they're newly arrived.

6. Presentation by Commissioner Muneeb Aslam from Human Rights Commission regarding their recommendation to City Council on a Cease Fire Resolution.

Written by Human Rights Commission members by those who are most impacted by current events both locally and abroad. This recommendation impacts the Commission on Immigrant Affairs as everyone is an immigrant and are tied to local and federal political activity.

Texas contributes over 300 million dollars through income tax and Austin contributes 15 million dollars to the Israeli war. The transformative impact that our tax dollars can have if used locally rather than funding a war outside of the U.S. – can be used towards public housing the houseless, increase salaries for teachers, or eradicating student debt for 400 students.

Financial implications are not the only reason for this resolution, but the human cost of this conflict has been devastating. Over 25,000 people have been killed because of the Israeli bombardment over Gaza with primary victims being women and children up to 16,000 have been killed. Thousands of children are under the rubble. And no aid is allowed in Gaza with over a quarter of the population starving. This also condemns the attacks in October of the 12,000 people who were killed.

This is a call for the City to recognize the heightened antisemitism, islamophobia, anti-Palestinian rhetoric and anti-Arab rhetoric.

A ceasefire is needed to recognize our humanity and to advocate in solidarity with all people. 3 City Council members who have released a public comment about a ceasefire. This recommendation is supported by many organizations such as the Jewish Voices for Peace, The Austin Young Democrats, Palestinians for Peace.

7. Review and discuss the scope and membership updates of the Budget and the Quality of Life Study working groups.

Commissioner Martinez wants to ask City Council to fund this QOL study focused on the immigrant community and support this effort. He said he will work on a generic draft/resolution and wants to get Commissioner Lalgue's input for the QOL study working group.

Commissioner Badillo is concerned about the QOL study and feels is very important for the safety and security of the community. She is speaking on behalf of the Hispanic community because the quality of life of these members are not good when they feel unsafe. She's been working with Worker's Defense Project for 20 years and wants the City to recognize them as part of society.

Rocio Villalobos shares information sessions on SB4 at the Southeast Library on the 16th and 26th to help address the concerns of the community.

Commissioner Ortega addresses the QOL study and addresses commitment levels of those involved with the study and membership.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION

8. Discussion and possible action on approval of recommendation on Combating Antisemitism, Islamophobia, and Anti-Arab Sentiments in the City of Austin and promoting a peaceful resolution for all.

The recommendation was approved on RENNISON LALGEE’S motion, VICTOR MARTINEZ’S second on a (7-0) vote. (COMMISSIONERS ANJUM MALIK, ADNAN SULEIMAN, FANG FANG absent)

9. Review and discuss the scope of all current working groups and possible action to update membership.
Current members of the budget workgroup are: Melissa Ortega and Adnan Suleiman.
Current members of QOL Study workgroup are: Aditi Joshi, Rennison Lalgee, Melissa Ortega and Adrian De La Rosa.

10. Discussion and possible action on planning the Commission’s retreat and confirm dates in the upcoming months.

March 23rd is set date at Permitting and Development Center.

WORKING GROUP/COMMITTEE UPDATES

11. Update from BUDGET WORKING GROUP regarding budget recommendations for FY25 (Commissioners Melissa Ortega and Adnan Suleiman).

No updates.

12. Update from QUALITY OF LIFE STUDY WORKING GROUP regarding recommendations (Commissioner Victor Martinez).

No updates.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

Commissioner Adrian De La Rosa asked to discuss the email sent by an attorney regarding an appeal case. They will add to agenda to discuss.

Chair Melissa Ortega adjourned the meeting at 8:20 p.m. without objection.