



## RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

### **ASIAN AMERICAN QUALITY-OF-LIFE ADVISORY COMMISSION (AAQoL)**

Recommendation Number: [20260326-008]: Recommendation on the FY 2026-2027 Budget related to Austin Public Health Immigrant Legal Services

**Date of Approval:** March 26, 2026

**Recommendation:**

Restoration of the 10% funding cuts to Austin Public Health Immigrant Legal Services

**Description of Recommendation:**

Restoration of the 10% cut to the contract to American Gateways and Catholic Charities contracts.

Continued ongoing funding of all current contracts along with an expansion for Pro Se services is recommended. Pro Se services provide immigrants with legal advice, help with paperwork, and coaching through the legal system. Although stopping short of full legal representation, these services are a highly efficient use of taxpayer dollars and are vital to helping immigrants navigate the immigration process, since hearings and court dates may take years to schedule in the judicial system.

**Rationale:**

The Asian American Quality-of-Life Advisory Commission (AAQoL) strongly recommends continued funding for the Austin Public Health (APH) Immigrant Legal Services, Pro Se services, and Citizenship Clinics programs in the FY 2026-27 budget. This program plays a critical role in supporting the well-being of Austin's immigrant population. This need is particularly important at a time when regional and national policies continue to further reduce services for immigrants. Additionally, immigrant rights are being stripped due to frequent recent changes in immigration policies, significant shifts in immigration enforcement and detention, and inaccessible services.

APH Immigrant Legal Services currently has several contracts in place for American Gateways and Catholic Charities. Many of these contracts are coming to an end. The 2023 closure of Refugee Services of Texas has further reduced options for legal immigration assistance available in the community for refugees, many of whom are from Asian and Middle Eastern countries. For example, due to the budget shortfall, American Gateways has been forced to reduce the number of people it can provide with direct legal representation by approximately 10%, totaling nearly 30 clients (our fellow Austinites!). Cuts to its Pro Se Assistance funding have similarly required American Gateways to reduce the number of individuals it can serve in Austin/Travis County through its pro se clinics by approximately 10%. That means 10% fewer families and individuals receiving



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assistance with Know Your Rights information, filing pro se motions with the court, applications with the immigration court, and family safety planning materials and assistance. These individuals all earn below 200% of the federal poverty guidelines and, without representation and support, will not be able to afford legal assistance or representation. They are also at risk of fraud from non-attorneys/notaries.

We strongly recommend continued funding for the APH Immigrant Legal Services program at a level that allows it to meet the growing needs of Austin's immigrant population, including restoring the 10% of budget that was cut unilaterally across all social services contracts. It would be reckless to apply these cuts as the need for services has increased tenfold. Nearly all of those who were assisted were able to apply for and obtain their work permits with this legal assistance. The economic impact on Austin immigrants and the city itself would be devastating if people were denied services due to the 10% cut. The return of the 10% would be an optimal and efficient investment for Austin's economy and residents.

Contractors for this program provide critical legal assistance to immigrants in Austin. The program helps immigrants navigate the complex legal system, with a focus on areas like citizenship, deportation defense, and access to public benefits.

Motioned By: Commissioner Moledina

Seconded By: Commissioner Shrestha

Vote: 12-0

For: Chair Sin, Vice Chair Jambulapati, Commissioners Baig, Chen, Xiyi Chen, Huang, Li, Moledina, Shrestha, Sikder, Thakkar, Yang

Absent: Commissioner Dolling

Attest: *Nekaybaw Watson*, Staff Liaison