

IMMIGRANT ADVISORY BOARD, SUBCOMMITTEE FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE IMMIGRANT RESOURCE CENTER - RESPONSE TO MAYOR'S OFFICE MEMO

1. Considerations:

- a. Federal Law Enforcement** - the City of Bellingham would be well within its rights and in good company with other cities, to protect its immigrant residents from Border Patrol (CBP) searches and seizures by declaring our City's Immigrant Resource Center as a "protected area". This would also be in line with and would encourage CBP and Department of Homeland Security to protect the Immigrant Resource Center from enforcement actions, so that our City could truly begin to build trust between law enforcement agencies (of whom CBP is by far the largest in our County) and our immigrant residents.
 - b. Public Records Act** - there are common best practices to protect immigrants from unjust enforcement actions. Just like crisis centers, domestic violence shelters, community-based organizations, City and County service agencies, food banks, or other centers "distributing food or other essentials of life to people in need", the City of Bellingham could choose to not collect immigration status-related information from people seeking support from the Immigrant Resource Center. Our City could also choose to only collect self-identifying information such as contact information, only when absolutely necessary and only with the prior and informed consent of the people served. Our City staff can ensure that people served are aware of the Public Records Act requirements that could make their information publicly available, and then allow them to make their own decisions about sharing their information. In the years that Seattle's Office of Immigration and Refugee Affairs has operated, not once has ICE, CBP, nor DHS obtained information from the OIRA, according to their staff. Because "the PRA applies to all state and local government agencies and would also apply to any and all documents the City receives from a partner nonprofit or community serving agency", does the Mayor's Office then believe that none of the three models would be free of the "chilling effect" they are worried about?
 - c. Chapter 2.25 Bellingham Municipal Code (BMC 2.25)** - establishing and funding an Immigrant Resource Center is intended to support the people that BMC 2.25 is trying to serve "regardless of immigration status". How would serving this community conflict with BMC 2.25. The Mayor's staff also points out in the memo that should there be a conflict, City Council could modify the Code.
- 2. Models** - In May 2022, City Council directed the Mayor's Office to "provide the Council with operational model or models that would identify organizational structure as well as budget". To date, the Mayor's Office has not provided a budget proposal. The "needs, services and costs" should be determined by the members of the communities it seeks to serve. In the absence of guidance from the Mayor's Office, the subcommittee of the IAB responsible for developing the Immigrant Resource Center requests funding for a preliminary annual budget below:

Full Time staffing (salary + benefits)	\$500,000
Rent & Other overhead	\$50,000
Professional Services	\$75,000
Programs and Services	\$750,000

3. Review of Immigration Advisory Board (IAB) Proposal - the request from Bellingham’s immigrant communities has been to improve our City’s accessibility to our immigrant neighbors. Improved accessibility will allow immigrants ourselves to seek and implement systemic solutions that truly address the root causes and barriers that make life difficult for us. We immigrants are asking for the opportunity to actively participate in our local governance so that ALL residents are protected and everyone can lead lives fully integrated in Bellingham’s communities. It is not just an ask for increased services. It is an ask to address and solve root causes and barriers. Immigrants must have a place to democratically formulate, debate, and implement those solutions at the community level as well as the governmental level.

a. Purpose:

- i. Improve the ways in which the City brings culture and language sensitivity to service delivery - although “an internal effort is underway to increase language accessibility at front service counters and making the City’s website accessible in multiple languages remains a priority”, these efforts do not yet meet the need of the non-English speakers in our City, nor our County.
- ii. Support voter registration and education program - just under $\frac{2}{3}$ (about 64%) of immigrant voters are registered to vote. And very little voter engagement specifically addresses the issues that immigrants face.
- iii. Provide workforce support - Address work conditions that is not being addressed effectively in any other way
 1. Address wage theft issues
 2. Racial profiling and racial discrimination at work and in the community
 3. Climate-related disruptions such as being forced to work during extreme heat and dangerous smoke conditions
 4. Living and working in flood plains and not receiving flood evacuation information, at all, nor in languages understood in immigrant communities
- iv. Provide a structure and safe place for immigrants and refugees to report workplace issues, racial profiling incidents and discrimination, including help with locating an ICE detainee, once they are detained.
- v. In addition to these four areas highlighted by the Mayor’s staff, immigrants also need a place in the City to systemically address decisions and issues related to:

1. Housing and Utilities
 2. Healthcare
 3. Education
 4. Criminalization
 5. Climate Change
 6. Childcare
 7. Emergency Food and Shelter
 8. Public Safety
 9. Access to ID and civil services
 10. Disaster preparedness
- vi. Rather than direct immigrant concerns to third party organizations like the Dispute Resolution Center, which has no authority to change our City's processes and policies, immigrants must be at the table to address the barriers and issues they face everyday. There is no other place to move structural change than at the City-level itself.
- b. Governance: that none of the City's 24 Boards and Commissions provide governance is not a reason to *not* begin. It rightly functions differently than the present Boards and Commissions because the IAB is aiming to do something different - allow for immigrants to be an active part of local governance structures. The OIRA in Seattle similarly reports to Seattle's Immigrant and Refugee Commission. According to the Mayor's own organizational structure illustration, "Citizen Boards and Commissions" never actually intersect with the governance of our City. How does the City and the Mayor then stay accountable to its residents? The IAB is proposing to practice accountability to its immigrant residents. Seattle's OIRA put it this way, "The Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs was established in 2012 by [Seattle Ordinance 123822](#) with the recognition of the importance and need for a stronger relationship and increased accountability between the City of Seattle government and immigrant and refugee communities."
- c. Staffing: Is the Mayor's office suggesting that the Immigrant Resource Center should be staffed less than any of the Offices listed in the memo? In reality, the City's staff body is much much bigger (ie. hundreds of employees to carry out the work of the City) than the 10 staff listed by the Mayor's office. What number of staff does the Mayor's Office believe is appropriate to address the issues faced by our City's immigrant communities, that are not currently nor adequately addressed by existing offices and service agencies?
- d. Services: We are not seeking to duplicate existing services. We are requesting that the City build an accountability process in which those services actually meet the needs of our City's immigrant residents. What is needed and asked for, is NOT an internet based "clearing house or navigational service". What is being asked for is the opportunity and support to participate in Bellingham's civic life, including decision making processes and implementation of those decisions, many of which adversely impact our daily lives as immigrants.