

Proposal for City Funded Immigrant Resource Center

The purpose of a city funded immigrant resource center is to provide resources to all immigrants in Whatcom County, regardless of documentation status. Nearly 24,000 Whatcom County residents (10.11% of total population) were born outside of the United States, of which 12,048 are non-US citizens and 11,952 are naturalized US citizens. Immigrants are disproportionately impacted by discrimination, racism, language access issues, and emergency events such as Covid-19. A city funded immigrant resource center, established within the governance and oversight of the Immigration Advisory Board would:

- * Improve the ways in which the City brings culture and language sensitivity to service delivery
- * Support capacity building programs for community-based organizations (CBOs) serving immigrant and refugee populations
- * Support voter registration and education programs
- * Provide citizenship classes/programs
- * Provide multi-lingual services assisting immigrants and refugees accessing government and not-for-profit services
- * Establish measurable goals including but not limited to providing an annual report to the Immigrant Advisory Board and quarterly meetings with representatives of the IAB
- * Provide workforce support
- * Build English and other language capacity
- * Provide access to community, cultural and other educational programs; and
- * Provide a structure and safe place for immigrants and refugees to report workplace issues, racial profiling incidents and discrimination

* Create opportunities for input from immigrant communities by providing ongoing public forums to identify and address the needs of immigrant families in the city of Bellingham

* The Immigrant Resource Center shall adapt programs and offerings based off of real-world input. As people are unique, the IRC shall have the freedom to shift to meet real-world demands.

Primary areas of resource and referral services include:

- Legal services
- Healthcare
- Education
- Childcare
- Emergency food and shelter
- Public safety
- Protection from discrimination/civil rights
- Access to ID and civil services

Examples of cities who have established city funded offices of immigrant services:

Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York City, San Francisco, Baltimore, Buffalo, Denver, Detroit, Philadelphia, Nashville, San Antonio, Houston, Austin, Seattle.

* in many cases immigrant resource centers were established by Executive Order of the Mayor and later written into the city charter.

Cities for Action is a national network of more than 120 cities, providing support and best practices for municipalities seeking to offer more support for their immigrant community members.

The Immigration Advisory Board proposes that the city shall provide funds for a building lease, office furniture (desks, computers for staff, telephone, other standard office supplies as needed), furniture for guests (chairs, couches, tables, decoration) and staffing.

Examples of current open downtown rentals (for example purpose only):

\$2,261 / 1196ft² - Allied Arts Building

\$1,233 / 2144ft² – Bellingham Herald Building

\$1,154 / 577ft² - Red Front 1301 Commercial St.

Staffing:

4 FTE employees (to be determined)

1 Director of the Immigration Resource Center, duties of which include but are not limited to: coordinating with non-profit community organizations for the offering of free classes/programs for the Immigrant Community, working with various members of our diverse immigrant communities to offer relevant programs, the creation of a Cultural Celebration Fair, working with city officials to offer programs for immigrants interested in civic engagement, creating a safe and reliable report location for anyone to report on unsafe work conditions/rights being violated; to provide regular reports to the Immigration Advisory Board, and other duties as assigned.

3 Assistants; duties of which include but are not limited to: supporting the Director of the Immigration Center, compiling an on-going report to the City/Immigration Advisory Board of successful projects/new or shifting needs; to create meaningful relationships with our various immigrant communities, to keep the Resource Center Staffed full-time; to coordinate with the community based programs in the community to ensure ongoing support and regular programs that benefit our immigrant community, and other duties as assigned.