

## Migrants & Immigration Committee

### Committee Members

- Luis Antezana, Co-Chair
- Sonya Ulibarri, Co-Chair
- Youssef Badawi
- Tania Chairez
- Dee Daniels Scriven
- Steve Dobo
- Dane Erickson
- Juan Gallegos
- Christian Jimenez
- Janet Lopez
- Hans Meyer
- Roweena Naidoo
- Jennifer Piper
- Lauren Trent

### Summary and Assessment

The Migrants and Immigration Transition Committee does not have alignment with one specific city agency, but instead is an issue-area that intersects and involves multiple agencies and departments including Human Rights and Community Partnerships (HRCP) and the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Services (DOIRA), Denver Human Services, and the Office of Emergency Management.

Along with addressing key issues related to recent migrant arrivals, the Migrants and Immigration Transition Committee took into consideration potential changes to DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) which is being litigated in multiple courts, as well as the needs and resources available for documented and undocumented immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees who call Denver home. The document intends to refer to all types and status of people who have come to the US when it references immigrants unless otherwise specified.

Beginning in December 2022, Denver saw a substantial rise in the number of migrants arriving daily from the southern border, primarily from Venezuela, due to increased persecution, conflict, and the impacts of climate change and poverty. While many in the media and government attributed the influx to the anticipation of the expiration of Title 42, people do not migrate based on immigration policy. Root causes drive diasporas like the ones happening out of Venezuela, Nicaragua, Haiti, and Mauritania right now. The US government's policies can make migration safer and more orderly, or force people and their loved ones into dangerous and deadly crossings. Title 42 was a Trump-era policy initiated at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic that denied the right of migrants to seek asylum in the United States due to the public health emergency. It is anticipated that US customs officials turned migrants away over 2.8 million times while in place. Although it was anticipated that this policy would expire at the end of 2022, Title 42 ended up expiring on May 11, 2023. The Biden Administration has replaced Title 42 with similar bans, including a policy that forces people to apply for asylum in third countries, where the process is opaque or nonexistent or the governments are hostile to accepting asylum seekers and be denied before applying in the US.

As of July 10, 2023, Denver has provided emergency shelter and other services to over 12,800 migrants with 536 being currently sheltered in three city-operated short term shelters. The cost of these services is estimated at \$20 million dollars, only a portion of which has been reimbursed by the State of Colorado (\$3.5 million) and federal government (\$9.5 million). As of May 8, 2023 the City of Denver requires that migrants seeking emergency services, including shelter, have been processed by immigration authorities and given an A-number (Alien number) due to federal reimbursement policies. Temporary emergency shelter is limited to 30 days stay for people with minor children and 21 days for adults without minor children.

In addition to resources and services provided by the City & County of Denver, the emergency response has required strong collaboration with nonprofit organizations in the Denver metro area. Nonprofit partners have provided critical support in City-run shelters; addressed temporary,

transitional, and long-term housing options in the surrounding community; collected in-kind donations of clothing, toiletries and supplies; supported a full range of critical services including employment, healthcare and mental health access, childcare and school enrollment, food access, and legal services to name a few. The Newcomers Fund, hosted by the Rose Community Foundation, is the organized philanthropic response to support nonprofit activation.

*Two initial guiding questions that our committee has considered:*

**A. What key things is the City doing right in this area, according to feedback from stakeholders?**

- While other Colorado counties and municipalities have offered little to no emergency response for arriving migrants, the City & County of Denver has coordinated an emergency response and dedicated resources at a critical time.
- Partnership with the State of Colorado's Office of New Americans (ONA) and philanthropic partners have been critical to collaborate and advocate on resources/needs for new immigrant arrivals.
- Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund (DILSF) has two rounds of funding: 1) legal representation (fighting deportation) and affirmative support (DACA, AOS, U-Visa, etc). The second round is for organizational building capacity to support organizations in hiring attorneys and paralegals.
- Facilitating regular meetings between local law enforcement and immigrant and refugee groups to ensure that Safe City policies are followed, identify any inconsistencies or violations of policy and remedy them quickly.
- Including all Denverites in access to critical services and financial pandemic relief funds, allowing immigrants and refugees to remain in their homes and businesses.

**B. What are the key challenges facing this agency, according to stakeholders and current employees?**

- The current approach to temporary sheltering is limited to 30-day stays, has stretched city resources and employees, and lacks a sustainable and coordinated long-term approach. Housing availability, affordability, and access remain critical issues for the stability of newcomers and longtime residents alike. Barriers related to cost, documentation, work history, and stable employment compound this issue.
- Immigrants/migrants/refugees regardless of status need to work and have significant limitations. Innovation is needed to ensure employment pathways are open.
- Legal pathways for immigrants and asylum seekers Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund (DILSF) is limited to around \$300,000 per year. This limits tremendously what nonprofit legal services can do for Denverites.

### **Answers to Specific Guiding Questions**

**1. How can we better partner with surrounding cities and counties in the region to pool resources for existing service needs?**

- Work with service providers and city agencies to develop a regional map that documents movement of individuals and families statewide, following arrivals in Denver. Identify key locations, resources, partners, and service gaps. Share map and corresponding data with corresponding cities/counties and the State of Colorado. Share with policy-makers. Identify opportunities for centralized resource coordination, volunteer coordination, and private donations.
- Identify, convene, and coordinate internal positions that should support connection, relationship, partnership, and coordination with surrounding cities and counties.

Examples include the Regional Affairs position within the Mayor's Office and Office of Immigrant & Refugee Affairs.

- Better utilize state resources like the Colorado Resiliency Office, Colorado Department Education, and state-allocated recovery funds to coordinate resources and identify opportunities for cross-county federal funding opportunities.
- Create a Colorado-focused "Migrants Support Summit" for Colorado leaders to stimulate publicity, collaboration, and support among the diverse stakeholders to support migrants. Include cross-county/city community leaders, elected and government officials, service providers, media, etc.

**2. For migrants who do not intend to stay in Denver, how can we better partner with cities like El Paso to ensure that individuals reach their final destination?**

- Develop a centralized cross-sector approach to coordinate arrivals/departures to and from Denver. Many new arrivals travel on to Illinois, New York and Florida from Denver.
- Increase communication with local officials and shelter and service providers in El Paso (and other point of entry cities) to identify and resource direct routes to final destinations.
- Support the connection/communication between the Colorado's Office of New Americans, Department of Homeland Security, and ONA offices in other states. A new Migrant Integration Manager will support statewide coordination of arrivals.
- Inform and involve Colorado's Senators and delegation in advocating for effective resource allocation and logistical support from the Executive (currently President Biden) and from Congress.

**3. What role can the City play to provide employment opportunities for migrants and DACA recipients?**

- Expand training in multiple languages and in partnership with existing nonprofits for business ownership, entrepreneurship, cooperatives, and professional licensure as income generating vehicles for migrants, refugees and immigrants. Ensure support staff and personnel are culturally competent.
- Hire career coaches and navigators to help migrants and immigrants more easily access opportunities described above or resource nonprofit partners(worker centers, business development, job training, etc.) who provide these services to expand programs.
- Proactively support DACA protections calling on Congress to pass a broad pathway to citizenship like the Registry Act (the DREAM Act excludes 67% of young people brought to the US as children); be bold in developing a plan in preparation/anticipation of DACA being overturned. Identify pathways for DACA beneficiaries to retrain, or continue employment in Denver. Use the same creativity and tenacity as with marijuana legalization to take risks and be bold.
- Partner with college and university systems to broaden opportunities for students to be employed (see UCLA's Opportunity for All Campaign) and access additional paid professional opportunities (internships, research, etc.).
- Increase support for workers' centers that in addition to employment also help migrants and immigrants navigate issues like wage theft, workplace health and safety, and workers' rights. Ensure close partnership and data collection efforts between the City Attorney's office, the State's Attorney General and nonprofits to identify repeat offenders and restore wages.

## Recommended Priorities/Outcomes

KEY OUTCOMES	ACTIVITIES/COMMENTS
<p>1. Develop a sustainable, long-term approach to manage and operate temporary shelters for new arrivals; including contracting with an outside partner(s).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Review current RFP for contract services and create intentional processes for revision; include opportunities for smaller capacity, dispersed facilities.</li> <li>b. Consult with community partners and city agencies on the front lines of service delivery.</li> <li>c. Identify opportunities/requirements regarding collaboration with local nonprofit partners.</li> <li>d. Prioritize bids that are culturally responsive, have experience delivering migrant/immigrant services, include language justice, and are central to community resources (public transportation).</li> <li>e. Replace parking lot /"welcome" centers with more humane environments/locations. Activate underutilized city facilities and available land to partner with local nonprofits to renovate these spaces to become vibrant beacons of hope for New Americans.</li> </ul>
<p>2. Institutionalize budget line-items to support the comprehensive needs of new arrivals to Denver.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Significantly increase annual budget to support the Denver Immigrant Legal Support Fund. Cover cost of DACA renewals and other affirmative cases (AOS, U-VISA, N400s) for low income migrants to create a pathway to residency and increase legal representation for those fighting deportation cases. Launch a coordinated campaign to draw private matching donations to the fund.</li> <li>b. Allocate an adequate annual budget line-item for emergency shelter and wrap-around services for newly arrived migrants/immigrants.</li> <li>c. Create a fund to support the local nonprofit response/services directed toward new arrivals; focus on infrastructure, capacity-building, and general operational support; remove unnecessary barriers to access/implement funds (reimbursement approach, reporting requirements, contracting delays, etc.).</li> </ul>
<p>3. Expand viable employment and income-generating pathways for those awaiting work authorization; proactively develop a plan that ensures employment continuity for DACA recipients.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Provide training/education to all relevant city departments on how undocumented Denverites can earn income and pay taxes, are eligible for professional licenses, and entitled to public benefits.</li> <li>b. Hire community navigators to help underserved migrants and immigrants (ie. older adults) navigate jobs and housing; partner with state workforce centers.</li> <li>c. Utilize a 'cradle to career' educational and career development approach: navigating childcare, school enrollment and success, post-secondary enrollment, professional trades, job and workforce training, business development and entrepreneurial pathways, legal requirements and rights, etc.</li> <li>d. Support professionals license programs and accept/validate degrees from other countries.</li> <li>e. Develop policies/guidelines that support businesses and agencies in maintaining employment options for DACA recipients and ensure vehicles for pay continuity.</li> <li>f. Host migrant summit in December with NACAC and surrounding cities and counties (invite El Paso).</li> </ul>

<p>4. Advocate for development and implementation of policies and practices that support migrants and immigrants.</p>	<p>a. Implement policies to protect DACA recipients and establish Denver as a sanctuary city; advocate for DACA recipients and work with the private sector to ensure continued employment</p> <p>a. Enhance language access and translation services across city departments and services.</p> <p>b. Increase affordable housing options through bold ordinances that would allow Denver to pursue zoning percentage requirements on new construction, master leasing, removal of identification documents as a prerequisite for housing supports when possible, and resource aging or low income property owners who have been keeping rent affordable to make needed improvements for renters.</p> <p>c. Streamline application processes and improve communication for accessing benefits and services</p> <p>d. Collaborate with resettlement agencies and create a centralized resource database for community partners</p> <p>e. Foster coordination and collaboration between city departments, nonprofits, and private entities to address migrant needs comprehensively</p> <p>f. Facilitate cultural integration, social bonding events, and recognition of traditions through community engagement</p>
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<p><b>OTHER OUTCOMES</b></p>
<p>1. Revise current policy for limits to emergency sheltering to 6 weeks (minimum).</p>
<p>2. Review and commit to Denver’s Safe City policies (Executive Order 142) for the sheriff department, police, and other service providers.</p>
<p>3. Support expansion of workers’ rights training and resources for migrants and immigrants.</p>
<p>4. Promote integration of new arrivals in the local community through language, cultural, and community systems (schools, workplaces, etc.) that fosters a sense of belonging.</p>

**Proposed 100-Day Action Plan**

In the first 100 days, the Johnston Administration should:

- Develop a plan to sustain Denver’s emergency response for new arrivals and address issues related to outside contracting, cost management, transparency in process, and opportunities for local collaboration/sub-contracting.
- Review all current Denver shelter and transportation policies related to the migrant influx with an eye to improving outcomes for migrants who want to call Denver and/or Colorado home.
- Determine highest priority partnerships that support the migrant/immigrant population and convene leaders from state agencies, nonprofit and philanthropic partners, corporate/business sector, school districts, and local government officials from neighboring cities (Aurora, Commerce City, Lakewood, etc.) to propose a plan of partnership that includes service delivery and advocacy on the state and federal level.
- Declare DACA essential to our Denver community and launch a bold campaign to ensure every DACA recipient can receive a renewal grant or reimbursement; partner with city, nonprofit, and the private sector to ensure local protections. Denver should lead the conversation around immigrant rights in the nation.
- Bring together community leaders to identify needed changes to Denver ordinances that would support more affordable housing units. Pursue changes in the first year.