



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

1600 PACIFIC HIGHWAY, ROOM 335, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA 92101-2470

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: June 8, 2021

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

FRAMEWORK FOR THE FUTURE: CREATING AN OFFICE OF IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE AFFAIRS (DISTRICTS: ALL)

OVERVIEW

Immigrants and refugees are an integral part of the fabric of the San Diego community and have a set of unique needs related to their transition into a new community. The immigrant and refugee community is the economic engine that keeps our economy strong and brings rich cultural diversity to the region. Connecting these families and individuals to vital information, services and resources in various languages and a culturally competent manner is critical to the region's health, safety, and economic future.

Historically, many immigrant populations in San Diego have been disconnected from some of the very services they are eligible for and need. Others were denied benefits due to their immigration status because of state and federal policies. Some remain disconnected out of fear that any interaction with a government entity would expose them to countless risks.

That is why we are proposing to create an Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (OIRA). OIRA will serve as a centralized hub for all issues related to immigrants and refugees and connect individuals and families to County services and community resources and information. Through the creation of this office, we are taking critical steps to make San Diego County more welcoming for all residents.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

CHAIR NATHAN FLETCHER AND VICE-CHAIR NORA VARGAS

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to establish an Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs as an independent office within the Health and Human Services Agency and report directly to the Community Operations Officer, including additional staff support and resources, as appropriately classified by the Department of Human Resources, and reassigning existing staff positions that currently work on programs and services for immigrants and refugees.

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2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to refer costs of standing up this new office in the amount of \$2 million dollars to budget for consideration during the Fiscal Year 2021-22 budget deliberations and adoption.

3. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to return to the Board within 90 days with a report back on the proposed overall scope, roles and responsibilities of the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs, including reorganization of existing staff and resources that work with these populations and additional staff and resources needed for execution of the following duties including, but not limited to:
 - a. Building on existing refugee programs and establishing a priority of devoting county resources to the immigrant population, regardless of immigration status.
 - b. Providing a central location for public questions and connection to county and community resources, including available legal resources.
 - c. Creating an outreach and marketing strategy in-language to ensure community members know about available resources and know their rights on topics such as immigration, housing, worker rights, fraud protection, and general opportunities available throughout the county.
 - d. Establishing a physical office, an easily navigable website available in multiple languages, and a phone number to access resources, including 211.
 - e. Regularly engaging and convening stakeholders that represent immigrants and refugees to provide information and solicit information about trends and unmet needs and facilitating planning for better coordination among county programs.
 - f. Acting as an expert on immigrants and refugees in the San Diego region, presenting annually to the Board of Supervisors on work accomplished, demographics of the immigrant and refugee population, gaps in services and funding, improvement of program implementation and coordination and local, state and federal policy suggestions and engagement to improve life in San Diego for immigrants and refugees. This report shall be developed through stakeholder engagement and convenings of county agencies.
 - g. In partnership with the Public Defender’s Office of Assigned Counsel, creating a link for referrals to the Board-Created Immigrant Rights Legal Defense Program for detained immigrants facing deportation.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Over twenty percent of San Diegans were born in another country, but historically, many immigrants in San Diego County were denied services based on their immigration status because of misguided policies built on misinformation and false narratives about immigrants seeking to make San Diego their new home. As a result of these policies, many immigrants remain disconnected and unsure about what services they are eligible for and afraid that engaging with government entities could expose them to countless risks. An Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (OIRA) will create a sense of belonging and welcoming for all San Diegans and make it a County priority to proactively engage with communities previously left behind and provide an equitable playing field for them to thrive. As San Diego County continues its legacy as the California county that takes in the most refugees, OIRA will prioritize providing services and resources to immigrants and refugees, regardless of immigration status. In outreach and

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relationship building, OIRA will provide connections to available resources and share critical information about legal rights, education and general resources for those immigrants making their home in San Diego. OIRA will remain connected directly to the community by engaging stakeholders for feedback on the needs of the community. OIRA staff will become an expert on issues related to immigrants and refugees and bring policy proposals before the Board of Supervisors annually as to how it could better meet needs. This proposal’s development resulted from several meetings with community groups and advocates who shared its importance and what roles would be most critical to support immigrant and refugee populations. It is anticipated that these actions will create a healthier and more welcoming San Diego for all residents.

FISCAL IMPACT

Funds for this request are not included in the Fiscal Year 2020-2021 Operational Plan, and there is no fiscal impact associated with this request in Fiscal Year 2020-2021. Funds covering new costs for this Office, in the amount of \$750,000, were included in the Chief Administrative Officer’s Recommended Operational Plan for Fiscal Year 2021-2022. We are proposing additional funding to ensure the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs can fulfill the duties outlined in our proposal. If approved, total costs and funding required to staff and maintain the functions of the new Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs are estimated to total \$2 million with a projected staffing impact of 5 FTEs, based on similar offices performing these functions in other jurisdictions. This request will be referred to the budget for consideration during Fiscal Year 2021-2022 budget deliberations and adoption. The preliminary recommended funding source would be General Purpose Revenue, but will eventually be determined by program design, duration, and available funding.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

San Diego County is a binational, multilingual, and multicultural region, and immigrants and refugees are an integral part of the fabric of our community. According to the ACLU of San Diego and Imperial Counties, over 20 percent of San Diegans were born in other countries, and these residents speak 68 different languages. Immigrants and refugees have a set of unique needs related to their transition into a new community. Coming from diverse backgrounds, many having navigated incredible hardships, immigrants, refugees, and people seeking asylum are resilient and deserve to thrive, regardless of immigration status. Connecting these families and individuals to vital services and resources in various languages and a culturally competent manner is critical to the future of the San Diego region.

Historically, many immigrant populations in San Diego County were denied services based on their immigration status because of misguided state and federal policies built on misinformation and false narratives about immigrants seeking to make San Diego their new home. As a result of these policies, many immigrants remain disconnected and unsure about what services they are eligible for and afraid that engaging with government entities could expose them to countless risks.

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These same immigrants and refugees are particularly in need of services based on the life experiences that led them to San Diego. In recent months, the Board of Supervisors has enacted numerous initiatives to prioritize the health, well-being and safety of San Diego residents. These priorities should extend to all immigrant and refugee populations in order to build a stronger and healthier San Diego for all.

That is why we are proposing to create an Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (OIRA). OIRA will serve as a centralized hub for all issues related to immigrants and refugees and connect individuals and families to county services and community resources. Communities have advocated for this office for years to repair some of the damage done by previous policies and administrations. Because we want OIRA to be particularly engaged with the community and be public-facing in a unique way, we are proposing that OIRA be an independent office within the Health and Human Services Agency, within the Department of Homeless Solutions and Equitable Communities, reporting directly to the Community Operations Officer.

The County has established programs for refugees and strong connections with community organizations serving this population. The creation of OIRA will build on these programs and relationships and focus on all immigrants in San Diego County, regardless of immigration status. OIRA will serve as a resource hub for all San Diego immigrants and refugees, where the public can ask questions and seek information and connect to County and community resources. Immigrants and refugees are particularly in need of access to legal resources and, at the same time, susceptible to bad actors taking advantage of these residents. Thus, OIRA should create a list and referral system of trusted purveyors of legal services on topics such as immigration issues (including adjustment of status, DACA, U Visa, and asylum), housing laws, worker's rights, and reporting Notario fraud. Additionally, OIRA will partner with the Public Defender's Office of Assigned Counsel, creating a link for referrals to the Board-created Immigrant Rights Legal Defense Program for detained immigrants facing deportation. Another priority for OIRA will be proactive outreach and education campaigns, ensuring the community is aware of available resources and developing educational "know your rights" campaigns on essential topics, like landlord/tenant and immigration issues, and providing inclusive access to civic processes.

Accessibility is of the utmost importance to ensure that vulnerable communities can make use of critical resources. Therefore, in addition to the physical location, resources should be available via an easily navigable website translated into additional languages and a dedicated phone line with translation. In determining future programming, OIRA should explore opportunities to directly bring mobile services to the communities that need them to achieve greater access. Additionally, OIRA should work directly with the Chief Administrative Officer's office on issues related to language accessibility to increase and improve language access enterprise-wide and on external communications.

The creation of OIRA has been a community priority for years, and keeping the community engaged is integral to meet the needs of the populations being served. Thus, OIRA should continue to build relationships and connections with community stakeholders to obtain input on the needs and gaps in services facing immigrant and refugee populations.

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Overall, OIRA will serve as the expert and the convener on issues related to immigrants and refugees in San Diego. In recent months, the County of San Diego has stepped up to support the housing of migrant children at the San Diego Convention Center. This temporary location serves a critical humanitarian purpose, and services and support were put together in a short amount of time following the call of the Biden Administration to our region. The creation of this shelter was only possible because of federal support provided to compassionate community-based organizations and agencies that worked together and are dedicated to caring for these children. In case of future such emergency needs, OIRA can serve as the lead to bring agencies and organizations together to determine how to operationalize such emergency situations related to immigrants and refugees. There also should be an exploration for a flexible space that can be used in case of future incidents that require short-term, emergency housing of migrants.

In its role as an expert on issues related to immigrants and refugees in San Diego, OIRA will research and analyze issues related to immigrants and refugees and annually present to the Board of Supervisors on work accomplished, data gathered, and gaps in services and funding. OIRA will also provide policy suggestions on the needs in the community and how the County could change local, state and federal policy to improve life in San Diego for immigrants and refugees.

Today's action is a critical first step in a long road to creating the most welcoming San Diego County.

We urge your support.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today's proposed action to create an Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs supports the Building Better Health and Operational Excellence Strategic Initiatives in the County of San Diego's 2021-26 Strategic Plan by ensuring that all residents have access to the services and resources they need to thrive in San Diego.

Respectfully submitted,



CHAIR NATHAN FLETCHER
Supervisor, Fourth District



VICE-CHAIR NORA VARGAS
Supervisor, First District

ATTACHMENT(S)

N/A

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AGENDA ITEM INFORMATION SHEET

REQUIRES FOUR VOTES: Yes No

WRITTEN DISCLOSURE PER COUNTY CHARTER SECTION 1000.1 REQUIRED

Yes No

PREVIOUS RELEVANT BOARD ACTIONS:

04/06/21 (6) Creating a Department of Homelessness Solutions and Equitable Communities;
05/04/21 (5) Provide Legal Representation to Detained Immigrants Facing Removal Proceedings.

BOARD POLICIES APPLICABLE:

Board Policy E-10, Comprehensive Health and Social Services System

BOARD POLICY STATEMENTS:

N/A

MANDATORY COMPLIANCE:

N/A

ORACLE AWARD NUMBER(S) AND CONTRACT AND/OR REQUISITION NUMBER(S):

N/A

ORIGINATING DEPARTMENT: Fourth and First Supervisorial Districts

OTHER CONCURRENCE(S): N/A

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