



AGENDA REPORT

City Council

DATE:	March 4, 2025
TO:	Mayor Martinez and Members of the City Council
FROM:	Council Member Claudia Jimenez Council Member Dora Robinson (Co-sponsor) Vice Mayor Cesar Zepeda (Co-sponsor)
Subject:	Immigrant Legal Services and Resources
FINANCIAL IMPACT:	Estimated \$1,000,000 from FY 2024-25 surplus funds
PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION:	None
STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE:	<p>As the landscape of immigration policy continues to shift, it is more important than ever to ensure that immigrants have access to the legal assistance they need to navigate complex systems and safeguard their rights. Access to legal services is not just a matter of protecting individual rights; it is also essential for the broader community. By ensuring that immigrants have the tools to address their legal challenges, we help create a society that values justice, fairness, and compassion. Furthermore, supporting immigrants strengthens our economy, fosters community integration, and promotes social stability.</p>

RECOMMENDED ACTION:	DIRECT staff to allocate up to \$1,000,000 from Fiscal Year (FY) 2024-25 surplus funds for immigrant legal services and a public awareness campaign for immigrants in Richmond to know their constitutional rights and issue an Request for Proposal (RFP) to select a fiscal sponsor to distribute the allocated funds to nonprofit organizations that will provide such services - Vice Mayor Cesar Zepeda (510-620-6593), Councilmembers Claudia Jimenez (510-620-6565), and Doria Robinson (510-620-6568).
----------------------------	--

DISCUSSION:

In recent years, immigrant communities have experienced significant uncertainty due to the evolving landscape of immigration law. Individuals facing potential deportation, changing asylum processes, and family separations are in urgent need of legal counsel. Unfortunately, the demand for legal services far outpaces the supply, leaving many without representation or the proper guidance to navigate these challenges.

The key challenges include:

- **Insufficient Access to Legal Representation:** A shortage of qualified immigration attorneys, compounded by financial barriers, leaves many immigrants unable to secure the legal assistance they need.
- **Evolving and Complex Immigration Laws:** As immigration laws and policies continue to shift, immigrants are left without a clear path to navigate the legal system.
- **Limited Resources for Community Education:** Many immigrants are unaware of their rights or the available services, making them more vulnerable to exploitation or deportation.

To shore up the challenges listed above, the Richmond immigration community needs access to legal services and access to materials to understand their legal rights.

1. **Increase Funding for Legal Aid Programs:**
A major barrier to access is financial. Legal aid organizations often operate on tight budgets, limiting their ability to serve all those in need. Increasing funding for these organizations will allow for the hiring of additional attorneys, case workers, and support staff, ensuring that more individuals can receive timely legal representation.
2. **Provide Legal Education and Outreach**
Immigrants often do not know what resources are available to them. Expanding outreach efforts, including community-based workshops, multilingual resources, and collaboration with local organizations, will ensure more individuals are aware of their legal rights and can access services early in the process.

NEXT STEPS:

If approved, City staff will work with the finance department to ensure that the amount is allocated from surplus funds from the City's FY 2024-25 budget. Following the allocation of funds, City staff will issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) to select a fiscal sponsor that will coordinate the receipt and distribution of the allocated funds to nonprofit organizations that can provide legal services to the immigrant community and conduct the awareness campaign described above.

DOCUMENTS ATTACHED:

None