



CITIES *for* **ACTION**

A Vision for Immigration Action

JANUARY 2021

Local Leaders' Recommendations for Building Inclusive, Equitable, and Resilient Communities for All



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CITIES
for
ACTION

Letter from Local Leaders

January 2021

As leaders who are part of Cities for Action, a coalition of nearly 200 mayors and county executives that advocates for pro-immigrant federal policies, we are proud to present to the Biden Administration and the 117th Congress a vision for immigration that will support the safety, health, and well-being of our communities.

We represent diverse jurisdictions from across the country—large and small, urban and rural, in “red” and “blue” states—that are united by our understanding that immigration uplifts and enriches our communities. We recognize the pivotal role immigrants play in our cities and counties. And we know that pro-immigrant policies and programs support and empower our localities to become even more inclusive, equitable, and civically engaged.

In the last four years, we have come together repeatedly to make our voices heard in response to attacks by the Trump Administration against immigrants and refugees. From defending DACA to responding to the public charge rule and attacks on welcoming cities, we have used our platforms to speak out against xenophobia and racism and to urge a federal approach that will help our communities thrive.

Now, as we greet a new year and new Presidential Administration and Congress, federal leadership on immigration is more important than ever. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the contributions of immigrant essential workers and the interdependence of our communities, while also laying bare in sobering terms the urgency of addressing the structural and institutional inequities that have devastated our Black and Brown communities.

We welcome the opportunity to work with the Biden Administration and the 117th Congress to ensure an equitable response and recovery to the COVID-19 pandemic that includes our immigrant residents. We further set out the following priorities on immigration for our federal partners.

I. Partner with local leaders to support the successful economic, social, and civic integration of immigrant families

- ◆ Establish a White House Office of New Americans;
- ◆ Invest in additional resources, coordination, and technical support for language access at all levels of government;
- ◆ Enhance educational and employment opportunities for immigrants that support local economies; and
- ◆ Increase access to citizenship.

II. Address immigration barriers that marginalize immigrant residents, separate families, and limit our communities' capacity to thrive

- ◆ Create a pathway to citizenship;
- ◆ Provide meaningful and fair access to immigration benefits and status;
- ◆ Keep families together by rethinking enforcement and shifting away from detention;
- ◆ Create a national funding stream for immigration legal services; and
- ◆ Give local economies a boost by reforming employment-based immigration opportunities.

III. Respect for local decision-making and expertise on public safety and public health

- ◆ End efforts to condition federal funding on local cooperation with federal immigration enforcement;
- ◆ Respect local public safety and the administration of justice; and
- ◆ Facilitate greater support for immigrant crime victims who help law enforcement.

IV. Recognize the role of local governments in upholding our nation's values and in addressing global challenges

- ◆ Raise the annual refugee admissions ceiling and rebuild the resettlement infrastructure;
- ◆ Remove cruel and unfair barriers to asylum; and
- ◆ Recognize the strength and needs of transnational communities in responding to humanitarian and environmental disasters.

We look forward to working in pursuit of a more inclusive and equitable country for all.

SIGNED

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About Cities for Action

In December 2014, a group of 25 mayors came together in New York City to form Cities for Action, a national coalition of local government leaders advocating for pro-immigrant federal policies and launching inclusive programs and policies within our localities. Since then, Cities for Action has grown in membership to nearly 200 mayors and county executives, representing nearly 70 million residents, over 17 million of whom are immigrants. Cities for Action members recognize that policies that strengthen our immigrant communities strengthen our cities and counties. The coalition's priorities are ensuring public safety for all of our constituents, regardless of immigration status, advancing immigrant rights, and promoting immigrant inclusion and engagement in civic life.

The specific priorities outlined in this vision document were developed through an engagement process with Cities for Action coalition members this fall. Following the November 2020 election, Cities for Action facilitated small group conversations with members to identify a set of key pro-immigrant advocacy goals that localities wanted to share with the incoming Biden Administration and 117th Congress. On December 16, 2020, the coalition held a virtual convening and strategy session attended by 68 participants from 31 localities to further discuss our priorities for the advancement of immigrant rights and integration. This vision document is the result of these conversations and workshops.

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Introduction

As a coalition of nearly 200 U.S. mayors and county executives that advocate for pro-immigrant federal policies, Cities for Action is proud to present a vision for immigration that will support the safety, health, and well-being of our communities. As local government leaders, we have the privilege of proximity to our residents and understand their needs at the neighborhood, block, and even household level. Time and again, we have witnessed how inclusive policies result in stronger, safer, and more resilient communities, because immigrants are not only our neighbors and co-workers, but also our families.¹



In recent years, cities and counties have increasingly seized the opportunity to innovate and advocate on behalf of our immigrant residents in the absence of federal leadership and in the face of relentless attacks. In our jurisdictions, we have implemented policies and programs that advance the common welfare of all of our residents by providing concrete access and opportunities to our immigrant residents. At the federal level, Cities for Action members have also advocated for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, Temporary Protected Status (TPS), and other immigration reforms that support our communities, as well as defended against policies that harm immigrant families and our interest in safe, healthy, and economically thriving cities and counties.

After four years of Presidential action on immigration characterized by cruelty, xenophobia, and division and continued Congressional inaction, our country now has an opportunity to build a more resilient and inclusive society and enact long overdue immigration reforms. Public support for policies that keep families together and reaffirm our welcoming values is at an all-time high.² Moreover, a humane immigration system is more necessary than ever as cities and counties nationwide endeavor to ensure equitable, effective, and sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

As leaders of the nation's cities and counties—from large to small, urban to rural, in “red” and “blue” states—Cities for Action members are proud of our work individually and collectively to advance

pro-immigrant policies and innovative and inclusive integration programs. We are now ready, willing, and able to support bold federal action on immigration by the Biden Administration and the 117th Congress. We are encouraged to present the following recommendations on how national leaders can harness the leadership and expertise of localities to realize an immigration system that at once propels our economic vitality and community safety, ensures our humanity, and secures our leadership as a beacon for immigrants and refugees.

I. Partner with local leaders to support the successful economic, social, and civic integration of immigrant families

We are home to thriving immigrant communities that contribute to the dynamism and vitality of our cities and counties. From Boise to Boston, immigrants have brought new, vibrant life to our local industries, our Main Streets, and our schools, workplaces, houses of worship, and other civic institutions.

Our jurisdictions recognize the contributions of our immigrant residents and are committed to supporting their success, as we do with all residents. In fact, many innovative approaches to immigrant integration have been nurtured at the local level, from municipal identification document

programs, to the establishment of local offices dedicated to immigrant affairs or new Americans, to investments in citizenship access and immigration legal services.

In the absence of a national plan, localities have been on the frontlines of a broken and outdated immigration system and have taken up leadership in supporting immigrant integration and advancing immigrant success and well-being. We also understand the barriers that can inhibit immigrant residents from accessing opportunity and achieving success, including language barriers, fear in interacting with local government, challenges in accessing higher education and skills for employment advancement, and immigration restrictions limiting services and programs for vulnerable communities.

To achieve our shared mission of supporting immigrants' economic, social, and civic integration, cities and counties need strong partnership at the federal level. The Biden Administration and the 117th Congress should implement a national strategy for immigrant integration that includes the following action items:

- ♦ **Establish a White House Office of New Americans.** Such office would fund and promote immigrant integration and coordinate efforts across the federal government and with state and local partners. We know from our own experience the importance of having strong executive leadership to break down government silos, coordinate across multiple executive agencies, and ensure immigrant-inclusive approaches

by government on a range of issues, from education to health and social services to small business support. A White House Office of New Americans can additionally play a leadership role in convening local and state counterparts, as well as stakeholders from advocacy, education, labor, business, and philanthropy, to advance a comprehensive national strategy.

- ◆ **Invest in additional resources, coordination, and technical support for language access at all levels of government.**

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the challenges that governments at all levels face in providing accessible, accurate, and timely information to all of our residents, regardless of language

or literacy level.³ As this public health crisis has made all too clear, language access is essential to the health, safety, recovery, and resiliency of our jurisdictions and needs additional federal support. The Biden Administration and Congress should make investments in expanding the multilingual capacity of government at all levels. Localities need stronger federal leadership to ensure accurate and timely translation and interpretation for crucial public services and programs. Federal-level coordination on standards and policy guidance can also help localities take a consistent approach to terminology, as well as share best practices and technological innovations. Language access is not simply good policy for our jurisdictions, it's also a matter of civil rights. Our governments must make sure we reflect the diversity of our communities in service to and communications with the public.

- ◆ **Enhance educational and employment opportunities for immigrants that support local economies.** As workers and as business owners, immigrants help drive our local and regional economies, yet they often face challenges reaching their full potential due to various barriers including language skills, limited networks and access to workforce development programs, the digital divide, lack of access to loans for small businesses, lack of access to financial aid and in-state tuition for students, exclusion from occupational and professional licenses as well as drivers



licenses, difficulty obtaining recognition of foreign credentials, uncertain immigration status, and workplace exploitation and discrimination.⁴ Localities and states have pursued equitable opportunity for immigrants through a variety of methods, from state laws offering in-state tuition and financial aid access for Dreamers,⁵ to innovative and accessible models for promoting immigrant entrepreneurship, workforce development, and workers' rights.⁶ Federal leadership is needed to promote successful local and state strategies and to help lower barriers and expand opportunity nationally through federal funding, policy guidance, and technical assistance.

- ◆ **Increase access to citizenship.** Naturalization not only strengthens immigrant ties to the U.S. and enhances the civic and political engagement of immigrant communities, it also increases individual earnings and supports increased

employment and home ownership.⁷ Recognizing the benefit to our jurisdictions, localities have implemented various models for promoting naturalization, as well as encouraging new citizen voter registration.⁸ The Biden Administration and the 117th Congress must address the numerous barriers erected by the Trump Administration that have made naturalization more expensive, confusing, and time-consuming for otherwise-eligible immigrants, such as eliminating increased fees, increasing eligibility for whole or partial fee waivers, and addressing culturally biased changes to the citizenship test. The Biden Administration and Congress must also increase investments in promoting citizenship and immigrant civic participation generally through dedicated funding and partnerships with cities and counties, as well as with libraries, labor unions, employers, colleges and universities, and other partners.





A Coordinated Strategy for Immigrant Inclusion is Necessary for an Equitable Response and Recovery to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Without federal leadership and a national strategy that addresses the vulnerabilities and disparate health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, cities and counties will continue to struggle with implementing an equitable response and recovery. The pandemic has laid bare and exacerbated long-standing inequalities. Broad, inclusive relief and a tailored approach to specific challenges faced by immigrant families are necessary to safely get our entire communities back on track.

The pandemic has been devastating for communities that have for too long confronted structural and institutional inequity and racism. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Latino and Black residents, including the foreign-born, have experienced higher case rates, hospitalization rates, and death rates, attributable to systemic disparities in socioeconomic status, access to health care, and increased exposure to COVID-19 through work.⁹ Local analysis looking at foreign-born residents has similarly found higher rates of COVID-19 cases and deaths in immigrant-dense neighborhoods.¹⁰ Indeed, immigrants have been on the frontlines of the pandemic as essential workers—doctors, nurses, home health aides, and other health care providers, as well as grocery workers, delivery workers, child care providers, agricultural workers, and workers at food processing facilities.¹¹ An estimated five million undocumented immigrants—nearly three in four undocumented immigrants in the workforce—are in essential roles, keeping our cities and counties running during this time of crisis.¹²

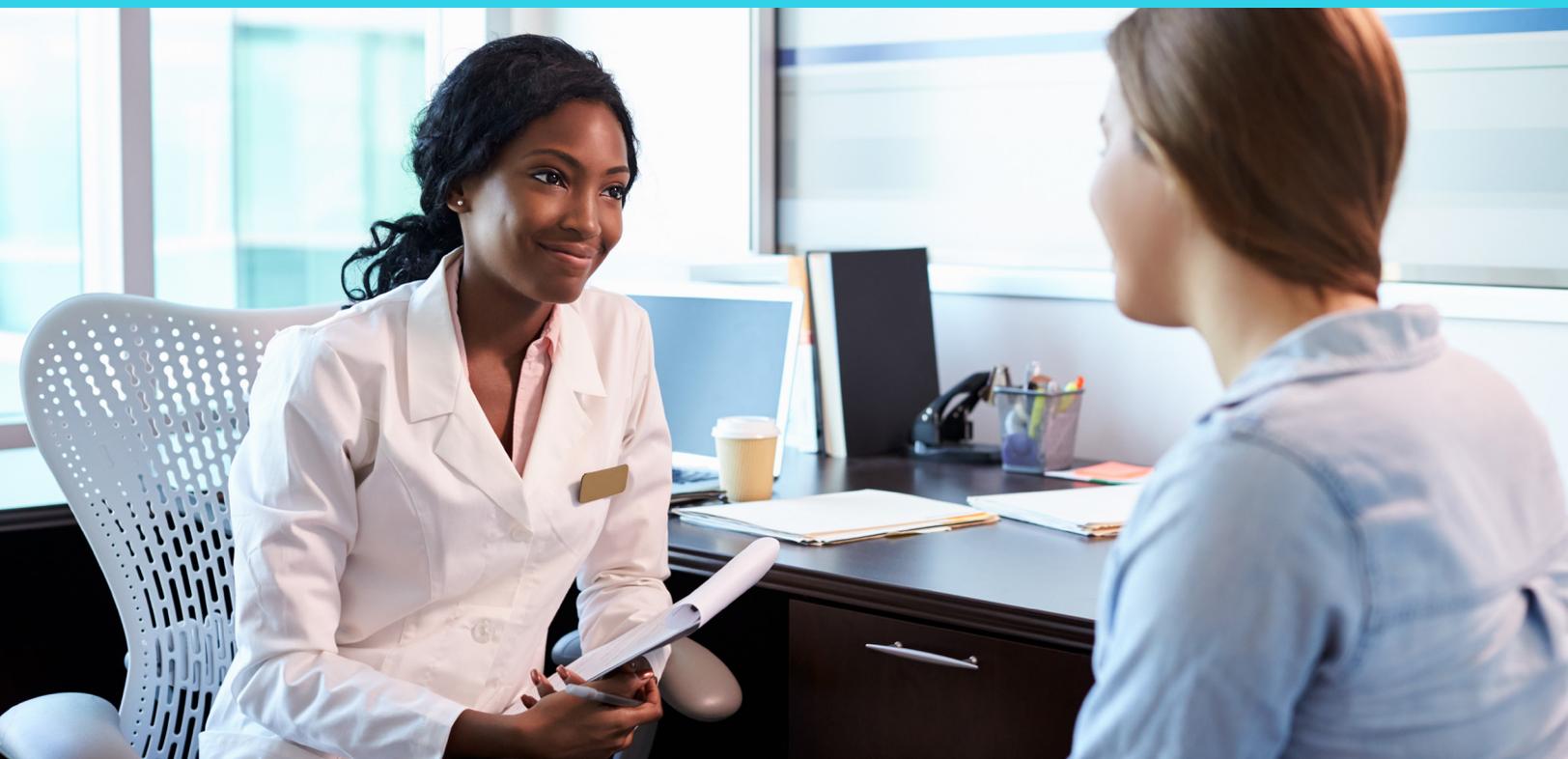
Immigrants have also been among the workers most affected by unemployment and the economic impacts of the pandemic, as industries with significant foreign-born workforces such as hospitality and food services have undergone massive job losses¹³ and small business owners fight for survival. For undocumented immigrant workers in particular, their exclusion from a range of federal, and to some extent state, relief and safety net programs has exacerbated economic vulnerability for themselves and their families, leading to a crisis in food and housing insecurity.

Localities have used a variety of pragmatic and inclusive strategies to address the health and economic crisis facing immigrant families in their jurisdictions. These include distribution of emergency food that is broadly accessible and culturally appropriate, emergency cash assistance to help address gaps in existing relief and benefits programs, eviction protections and rental assistance to protect immigrant tenants from eviction, and the use of multilingual videos, graphics, webinars, and other communications materials to get crucial information to different communities.¹⁴ Many cities and counties, however, face our own fiscal crisis.

We must also contend with significant fear and confusion in immigrant communities around access to public services and trust in government, especially following four years of anti-immigrant attacks by the Trump Administration such as the public charge rule and over-aggressive interior enforcement.¹⁵

Our ability to successfully recover from the pandemic relies upon federal leadership that recognizes the contributions of immigrants during the pandemic, the impact of the pandemic on all of our residents, and the interdependence that underlies the health, safety, and economic well-being of our communities. Without a mitigation and recovery strategy that is inclusive of all, our cities and counties will be hampered in our pursuit of an equitable and resilient post-COVID-19 future. This strategy should include:

- **Expanded access to pandemic relief and health care** to address gaping holes in the safety net faced by immigrant small business owners, essential workers, and unemployed workers and families. Addressing hunger, shelter, vaccine access, and health care must be a priority, regardless of immigration status.
- **Strong, coordinated outreach and multilingual messaging** that immigrants should not fear interaction with government and can safely access medical care—including COVID-19 testing, treatment, vaccines, and preventative care—as well as emergency food, shelter, and other resources during the pandemic.
- **Immigration relief that recognizes the contributions of immigrant essential workers** and sets them on a path to work authorization and citizenship, as well as enforceable protections for all workers, regardless of immigration status, to help them demand safe working conditions without the fear of retaliation.
- **Leadership to address a rise in racism and xenophobia** connected to the COVID-19 pandemic, through public messaging denouncing harassment, discrimination, and bias-motivated crimes, as well as training for government officials and the general public on resources available to address racism and xenophobia as a public health issue.
- **Tailored workforce and recovery strategies for immigrant-dense industries decimated by the pandemic** so that immigrant workers who helped build these industries have access to training and support that will allow them to return to work with dignity.
- **A moratorium on immigration enforcement** while the pandemic continues to threaten public health, and the release of vulnerable and immuno-compromised individuals from immigration detention.



II. Address immigration barriers that marginalize immigrant residents, separate families, and limit our communities' capacity to thrive

In our cities and counties, we see up close the life-changing effects of federal immigration policy changes and enforcement on immigrants and citizens alike. In 2012, with the creation of DACA, the lives of hundreds of thousands of young immigrants, Americans in every way except for their citizenship status, changed for the better. In turn, DACA recipients changed for the better the local

economies and civic institutions of our cities and counties. In contrast, the changes to the public charge rule led to widespread confusion and fear among immigrant families uncertain about whether they would face severe immigration consequences for accessing help they needed and qualified for. Cities and counties continue to confront the chilling effects of the public charge rule, as our immigrant residents—including lawful permanent residents and many other immigrants not subject to the rule—are fearful of accessing critical care, including for their U.S. citizen children, even in the face of a national public health crisis.

There are myriad ways in which federal immigration policy, from seemingly technical changes at the agency level to broad-reaching executive or congressional action, have kept immigrant families from living full lives.

Reforming our immigration system to restore the focus on family unity, citizenship, dignity for workers, and the well-being of local communities will not only allow us to recommit to the American Dream but also allow our localities and, in turn, our country to grow.

We call on the Biden Administration and the 117th Congress to address barriers in federal immigration policy that keep our immigrant families from reaching their full potential and thus limit our cities and counties' full capacity to thrive, including:

- ♦ **Create a pathway to citizenship.** We are heartened to see that the Biden Administration will recognize the importance of a pathway to citizenship for all 11 million of our undocumented residents.¹⁶ Cities for Action has long advocated for reform that values family and community ties and accounts for the



enormous contributions made by our residents who are undocumented, including those with DACA and TPS, and immigrant essential workers.¹⁷ These residents are integral parts of our families, as evidenced by the large number of mixed status families in our localities. And most have lived in our country for over a decade, becoming valued members of our communities.¹⁸ Creating a path to citizenship will support the stability of families and children¹⁹ and provide significant economic and other benefits to cities and counties.²⁰ As he has publicly committed, President Biden should introduce and Congress should pass legislation to bring relief to these American families within the first 100 days of his administration.

- ♦ **Provide meaningful and fair access to immigration benefits and status.** The more than 400 policy changes adopted over the past four years have effectively dismantled the legal immigration system, creating enormous barriers for those who are eligible for immigration benefits.²¹ While more widely known changes—such as the public charge rule and the drastic increase in U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) application fees—impose obvious barriers to status, lesser known, more technical changes—such as changes to the USCIS Policy Manual instructing officers to exercise their discretion in ways that dictate denials—have acted as invisible hurdles to relief. In addition, changes to

regulations governing immigration court procedures have made due process and access to relief more difficult to obtain for immigrants. Localities have a strong interest in our residents' ability to adjust their status, become naturalized, and remain with their families if they are eligible to do so, as obtaining legal status and eventually citizenship often results in significant economic gains for our residents in terms of growth, earnings, tax revenues, and jobs.²² Congress should exercise its oversight authority to hold both USCIS and the Executive Office for Immigration Review accountable to their Congressionally mandated missions to avoid misguided policies such as the public charge rule. Further, the new Administration must embrace our nation's historic identity as "a nation of immigrants,"²³ and reform USCIS and the immigration courts to make it the norm, and not the exception, for immigrants to fairly access immigration benefits and relief for which they are eligible.

- ◆ **Keep families together by rethinking enforcement and shifting away from detention.**

Immigrants—whether they be lawful permanent residents, temporary visa holders, or undocumented—have significant, deep ties to our families and are integral parts of our communities. Despite these ties, the federal immigration system has been increasingly characterized by an enforcement-only approach. The rise in detention,²⁴ deportations,²⁵ as well as the constant threat of enforcement, have

been hugely detrimental to the physical, mental, and economic well-being of our families and children.²⁶ When families are living under fear or instantly destabilized through increased enforcement, entire communities suffer, with community members becoming more fearful and mistrustful of public institutions, and less likely to participate in civic life and social services.²⁷ Moreover, instability and uncertainty in immigrant families in our communities makes our localities and nation less resilient and less able to meet our full social and economic potential. We are encouraged to see the Biden Administration commit to a 100-day moratorium on enforcement while it reevaluates enforcement priorities. This first step must lead to the Administration and Congress reorienting our immigration system to one that prizes family unification over costly and inhumane punishments like detention and deportation. The use of civil immigration detention must be sharply curtailed, and transparency and accountability for humane detention conditions and the human rights of detainees must be strengthened.²⁸

- ◆ **Create a national funding stream for immigration legal services.**

Deportation has always been recognized as a particularly harsh penalty, resulting in the loss of "all that makes life worth living."²⁹ And unlike other civil violations, alleged immigration violations can result in the loss of liberty, often for the duration of the removal proceeding, which can last for years. What is more, many immigrants facing deportation have a legal basis to

stay with their families, but often cannot avail themselves of the relief without the help of counsel.³⁰ Yet, immigrants are not guaranteed free legal representation in these proceedings. We have seen that locally funded immigration legal services models like the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project have resulted in dramatically fairer and better outcomes for immigrant families.³¹ Ultimately, however, the federal government must support due process for immigrants in the federal immigration system by creating a funding stream for the provision of immigration legal services and for building local capacity to meet the legal needs of immigrant communities. The Biden Administration and Congress should significantly expand efforts to connect indigent immigrants with legal representation, with priority for those in detention facing removal.

- ◆ **Give local economies a boost by reforming employment-based immigration opportunities.**

Despite recent rhetoric, immigration is a net positive for economic growth and complements rather than competes with the native-born workforce.³² In fact, by almost every measure, immigrants have proven crucial to local economic growth. Immigrants are proven job creators. They are twice as likely as native-born citizens to start businesses—both small and large³³—and more than 8 million Americans are employed at these businesses.³⁴ International students, who bring future talent, innovation,



and vibrancy to college towns across the country, contribute \$39 billion to the U.S. economy and support more than 455,000 American jobs.³⁵ Further, immigrants have proven critical to filling labor shortages in key sectors,³⁶ and as we have seen in the past year, immigrants are overrepresented in essential industries like health care, agriculture, construction, maintenance, and food services.³⁷ Many cities and counties across the country have recognized that without full integration of our immigrant residents and encouraging sustained immigration, we cannot properly prepare for our future demographic and economic needs.³⁸ We need a federal government that understands these needs and will support local economic growth through reforms in employment-based immigration opportunities, from creating a pathway to citizenship for essential workers to making it easier for localities to sponsor immigration depending on their unique economic development needs.

III. Respect for local decision-making and expertise on public safety and public health

As local leaders, we know the critical importance of community trust to maintain public safety and public health for all our residents. When crime victims and witnesses avoid local law enforcement because of their immigration status, our neighborhoods become less safe. When families are fearful that seeking medical care will have negative immigration consequences for them or their loved ones, our communities are less healthy.

This perspective stems from our daily experience leading our cities and counties. It is also supported by research showing how residents' fear about immigration enforcement—and fear about local cooperation with federal immigration enforcement—can make it harder for local authorities to investigate and address crime, as well as inhibit immigrant residents from seeking health care, including crucial preventative health services.³⁹

Localities across the country have sought to build and sustain strong relationships with immigrant communities through the adoption of policies and programs that reflect local needs and local realities. These include over 700 counties that have policies restricting



local cooperation with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detainers, over 200 counties that restrict ICE access to local jails without a warrant, and thousands of localities that limit the collection and/or disclosure of sensitive information such as immigration status from residents seeking help from local authorities, including law enforcement.⁴⁰ While local policies vary in scope and approach, they have in common a recognition that our communities' safety and health needs are paramount, and that local cooperation with federal immigration enforcement can potentially detract from or undermine local priorities.⁴¹

Unfortunately, this pragmatic perspective is frequently distorted and politicized by those looking for opportunities to spread fear and division about immigrants. In reality, research indicates that jurisdictions seeking to support community interactions with local government by maintaining separation between local law enforcement and federal immigration

enforcement see no impact on crime and have even been found to be generally safer and stronger economically.⁴² The Biden Administration and the 117th Congress must recognize and honor local expertise and:

- ♦ **End efforts to condition federal funding on local cooperation with federal immigration enforcement.**

Recent federal efforts to compel cities and counties to use our resources to assist federal immigration enforcement fail to recognize the detrimental local consequences of eroding community trust and imperiling public safety. At risk is local discretion—informed by local expertise—about how to balance community engagement needs, privacy concerns for vulnerable residents, the use of limited resources, and other factors to protect the community overall. The Biden Administration and Congress must end all efforts to compel localities to assist in federal immigration enforcement.



- ◆ **Respect local public safety and the administration of justice.** ICE and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) activity in our jurisdictions, including the use of deceptive tactics like impersonating local law enforcement and enforcement at sensitive locations such as courthouses, have increasingly created fear and confusion among immigrant communities about local officials and institutions. Deceptive tactics that make it difficult for residents to discern federal immigration authorities from local police drive a wedge between local government and our residents and undermine our public safety strategies.⁴³ Similarly, aggressive enforcement activities at or near institutions such as schools and courthouses chill immigrant civic participation and access to justice.⁴⁴ The Biden Administration must end the use of enforcement tactics that jeopardize public safety and the administration of justice, and the Administration and Congress must ensure that mechanisms are in place for stronger training, supervision, and agency accountability.
- ◆ **Facilitate greater support for immigrant crime victims who help law enforcement.** To successfully address crime, our law enforcement agencies rely on the cooperation of immigrant communities to report crime and help investigators. Many of our localities have successfully worked with immigrant crime victims and their representatives to use the U and T

visa programs to help immigrants who have assisted law enforcement despite vulnerability regarding their status. The Biden Administration should further support local law enforcement by making resources including training and technical assistance about these programs available to local agencies, as well as work with Congress to increase the number of available U and T visas annually.

IV. Recognize the role of local governments in upholding our nation's values and in addressing global challenges

Over one out of every thirty people in the world is an immigrant.⁴⁵ As war, violence, climate change, economic inequality, and other drivers of migration continue to multiply, the project of building welcoming and inclusive local communities becomes more crucial. Although immigration laws governing entry and status remain the province of national governments, the sense of belonging an immigrant achieves often rests on the policies and programs of local governments.

Local governments in turn have increasingly embraced immigrant and refugees' contributions to our demographics,⁴⁶ economies,⁴⁷ and culture⁴⁸ and sought opportunities to build relationships with and exchange best practices for immigrant

inclusion with other cities and localities internationally. As government leaders closest to the community, we have a shared interest in humane migration policies that reaffirm our humanitarian values. And just as cities have been at the forefront of global efforts to combat the climate crisis, so too have localities driven bold and aggressive integration agendas in the absence of global leadership.

The incoming administration should recognize the value of local voices in addressing global migration challenges and immediately rejoin the Global Compact on Migration. Additionally, we urge the Biden Administration to recommit to our nation’s core welcoming values by taking steps to:

- ◆ **Raise the annual refugee admissions ceiling and rebuild the resettlement infrastructure.** After the last few years of record-low admissions, we are encouraged that the Biden Administration intends to raise the annual refugee admissions ceiling to 125,000. Our members have long recognized the enormous contributions of their refugee communities and the need to extend our welcome to new populations in need.⁴⁹ Many have even begun actively investing in policies and programs designed to attract more residents.⁵⁰ With the partnership of a federal administration that also recognizes the role the U.S. should play in upholding international humanitarian obligations and the long-term local revitalization benefits associated with resettlement, more

localities will be able to invest in their long-term vitality and in their commitment to humanitarian values.

- ◆ **Remove cruel and unfair barriers to asylum.** Over the last four years, there have been barriers enacted at every stage of the asylum process in the U.S., effectively dismantling the system.⁵¹ Even if asylum seekers make it past the almost insurmountable barriers at the border—like “metering,” “Remain in Mexico,” etc.—they are often subject to inhumane practices such as family separation and prolonged detention, even of children and families.⁵² Beyond running counter to our long-held, humanitarian values as a country, these barriers to asylum have harmed the public health, safety, and well-being of our members’ residents and communities.⁵³ The Biden Administration must not only rescind these roadblocks and rebuild the asylum system to be in line with our international obligations, but also reunite families separated at the border and act to address the additional trauma asylum seekers have been subjected to by federal policies over the last four years.
- ◆ **Recognize the strength and needs of transnational communities in responding to humanitarian and environmental disasters.** The U.S. has recognized for decades our moral obligation to provide safe haven for individuals unable to return to their home countries decimated by humanitarian and natural disasters. Many of our strongest immigrant communities—the Haitians

in Miami, the Salvadorans in L.A., the Nepalese in Dallas, etc.—came to this country during moments of crisis in their home countries. As the groundswell of bipartisan support for relief for countries in crisis like Venezuela has shown us, the anguish our immigrant communities feel in watching their families suffer from afar and in envisioning a future in which they may be forced to return to devastation is something localities also feel. The new Administration should consider the significant transnational ties of our local communities and redesignate for TPS for countries like Haiti, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, Nepal, Syria, Yemen, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Guinea, and Sierra Leone; and newly designate for TPS or Deferred Enforced Departure countries such as Venezuela, Guatemala, the Bahamas, Cameroon, Yemen, and others.

Conclusion

The immigrant communities of our cities and counties have enriched our culture, revitalized our economies, and strengthened our social fabric. While it has been a privilege to stand up for and protect our immigrant residents against hateful rhetoric and harmful policies over the past several years, local governments are ready to partner with the new Administration and Congress to imagine and build a better, more humane immigration system. Doing so will help our immigrant communities thrive and allow our cities and counties to recover, prosper, and maintain our resilience in the years to come.



- 1 Immigrants—including naturalized citizens, lawful permanent residents, temporary lawful residents, and undocumented immigrants—make up almost 14% of the nation’s population. See Abby Budiman, Pew Research Center, [Key Findings about U.S. Immigrants](#) (Aug. 20, 2020). About 12% of the nation’s population (39.4 million people) are native-born Americans with at least one immigrant parent. About 16.7 million people in the country, 8 million of whom are citizens, live in mixed-status families—meaning, there is at least one undocumented family member living in the same household. See American Immigration Council, [Immigrants in the United States](#) (Aug. 6, 2020). One in 12 citizen children in the country live with at least one undocumented family member (5.9 million children in total). See *id.*
- 2 See Jens Manuel Krogstad, Pew Research Center, [Americans Broadly Support Legal Status for Immigrants Brought to the U.S. Illegally as Children](#) (Jun. 17, 2020) (75% of adults across the country say there should be a way for all undocumented immigrants to stay in the country legally, with majorities in both political parties express support with 89% of Democrats and 57% of Republicans); see also Mariana Sana, [Public Opinion on Refugee Policy in the United States, 1938-2019: Increasing Support for Refugees and the Sympathy Effect](#), International Migration Review (Oct. 7, 2020) (favorable public opinion toward refugees has been on the rise since the beginning of the 21st century, and has sharply increased since 2017).
- 3 See Gaby Galvin, [“Language Access Issues a Barrier During COVID-19,”](#) U.S. News and World Report (April 16, 2020); Emma Goldberg, [“When Coronavirus Care Gets Lost in Translation,”](#) N.Y. Times (April 17, 2020).
- 4 See, e.g., Emily Flitter, [“Few Minority-Owned Businesses Got Relief Loans They Asked For,”](#) N.Y. Times (May 18, 2020); Ariel G. Ruiz Soto, Jeanne Batalova, Michael Fix, Migration Policy Institute, [The Costs of Brain Waste among Highly Skilled Immigrants in Select States](#) (Dec. 2016); Kate Hamaji and Christian Gonzalez-Rivera, Center for Popular Democracy and Center for an Urban Future, [A City of Immigrant Workers: Building a Workforce Strategy to Support all New Yorkers](#) (April 2016); Roberto G. Gonzales, American Immigration Council, [DACA at Year Three: Challenges and Opportunities in Accessing Higher Education and Employment](#) (Feb. 1, 2016).
- 5 National Conference of State Legislatures, [Tuition Benefits for Immigrants](#) (Sept. 26, 2019).
- 6 Amanda Bergson-Shilcock, National Skills Coalition, [At the Intersection of Immigration and Skills Policy: a Roadmap to Smart Policies for State and Local Leaders](#) (Sept. 2018) (describing innovative local and state approaches).
- 7 Maria E. Enchautegui and Linda Giannarelli, Urban Institute, [The Economic Impact of Naturalization on Immigrants and Cities](#) (2015); Manuel Pastor and Justin Scoggins, Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration, University of Southern California, [Citizen Gain: The Economic Benefits of Naturalization for Immigrants and the Economy](#), (2012).
- 8 See Cities for Citizenship, [Priced out of Citizenship: Municipal Strategies to Reduce the Financial Barriers to U.S. Citizenship in Light of New Fee Increases](#) (2020); New Americans Campaign, [Supporting Citizenship: An Opportunity for State and Local Governments](#) (July 2018) (describing different models).
- 9 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [COVID-19 Case Investigation and Contact Tracing among Refugee, Immigrant, and Migrant \(RIM\) Populations: Important Considerations for Health Departments](#) (updated Dec. 4, 2020), and [COVID-19 Hospitalization and Death by Race/Ethnicity](#) (updated Aug. 18, 2020) (also showing significantly higher case, hospitalization, and death rates among American Indian or Alaska Native persons).
- 10 See NYC Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs, Mayor’s Office of Economic Opportunity, and Department of Consumer and Worker Protection, [Fact Sheet: COVID-19 Health and Economic Impacts on Immigrant Communities](#) (July 2020). See also Laura E. Martinez, Arturo Vargas-Bustamante et al., UCLA Latino Policy & Politics Initiative, [Covid-19 in Vulnerable Communities: An Examination by Race & Ethnicity in Los Angeles and New York City](#) (2020).
- 11 Giovanni Peri & Justin C. Wiltshire, U.S. Davis Global Migration Center, [The Role of Immigrants as Essential Workers during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#); Julia Gelatt, Migration Policy Institute, [Immigrant Workers: Vital to the U.S. COVID-19 Response, Disproportionately Vulnerable](#) (March 2020).
- 12 Nicole Prchal Svajlenka, Center for American Progress, [Protecting Undocumented Workers on the Pandemic’s Front Lines](#) (Dec. 2, 2020) (incorporating DACA and TPS holders in undocumented population estimates).
- 13 Rakesh Kochhar, Pew Research Center, [Hispanic Women, Immigrants, Young Adults, Those with Less Education Hit Hardest by COVID-19 Job Losses](#) (June 9, 2020).
- 14 See e.g. [Philadelphia Worker Relief Fund](#) (emergency cash assistance to workers excluded from federal and state relief); [San Francisco Right to Recover Program](#) (\$1285 to support COVID-19 positive workers to quarantine, available to all regardless of immigration status); [City of Los Angeles Emergency Renters Assistance Program](#) (temporary rent subsidy for tenants, regardless of immigration status); [New York City GetFoodNYC COVID-19 Emergency Food Distribution](#), (range of emergency food services).
- 15 Miriam Jordan, [“We’re Petrified’: Immigrants Afraid to Seek Medical Care for Coronavirus,”](#) N.Y. Times (updated May 12, 2020). See also *supra* note 9.
- 16 See Morgan Chalfant, [“Immigration, Executive Action Top Biden Preview of First 100 Days,”](#) The Hill (Nov. 24, 2020).
- 17 In 2018, undocumented immigrants in the U.S. paid an estimated \$20.1 billion in federal taxes and \$11.8 billion in state and local taxes. See *supra* note 1 *Immigrants in the United States*. Further, a 2016 study found that deportation of all undocumented immigrants would immediately reduce the nation’s GDP by 1.4% and reduce cumulative GDP over 10 years by \$4.7 trillion. See Ryan Edwards and Francesc Ortega, Center for American Progress, [The Economic Impacts of Removing Unauthorized Immigrant Workers](#) (Sept. 21, 2016).

- 18 Bryan Baker, Dep't of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, [Population Estimates: Illegal Alien Population Residing in the United States: January 2015](#) (Dec. 2018).
- 19 The research literature finds that growing up with unauthorized immigrant parents places children—nearly 80% of whom were born in the U.S.—at a disadvantage. These children are more exposed to a number of risk factors than children of immigrants generally and all U.S. children, including lower preschool enrollment, reduced socioeconomic progress, and higher rates of linguistic isolation, limited English proficiency, and poverty. See Randy Capps, Michael Fix & Jie Zong, Migration Policy Institute, [A Profile of U.S. Children with Unauthorized Immigrant Parents](#) (Jan. 2016).
- 20 According to a series of reports prepared by the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office and Joint Committee on Taxation, the immigration reform legislation passed by the Senate in 2013 would have decreased federal budget deficits by approximately \$1 trillion over 20 years, increased the nation's GDP by 3.3 percent in 10 years and 5.4 percent in 20 years, and increased average wages for all workers after 10 years. See American Immigration Council, [A Guide to S. 744: Understanding the 2013 Senate Immigration Bill](#) (Jul. 2013).
- 21 See Sarah Pierce & Jessica Bolter, [Migration Policy Institute, Dismantling and Reconstructing the U.S. Immigration System: A Catalog of Changes under the Trump Presidency](#) (Jul. 2020).
- 22 See Robert Lynch & Patrick Oakford, Center for American Progress, [The Economic Effects of Granting Legal Status and Citizenship to Undocumented Immigrants](#) (Mar. 20, 2013).
- 23 Until February 2018, the USCIS emphasized "America's promise as a nation of immigrants" as the driving force of its mission. See Richard Gonzales, ["America No Longer 'A Nation of Immigrants,' USCIS Says," NPR](#) (Feb. 22, 2018).
- 24 From 2017-2019, the average daily number of people in U.S. immigration detention increased from approximately 33,000 to 47,000. The length of detention increased as well. See J. Reyes, Center for Migration Studies, [Immigration Detention: Recent Trends and Scholarship](#) (2019).
- 25 The U.S. has removed more than twice as many people in the first two decades of the 21st century as in the entire previous history of the United States. See Peter L. Markowitz, Center for American Progress, [A New Paradigm for Humane and Effective Immigration Enforcement](#) (Nov. 30, 2020).
- 26 Although enforcement affects all family members, the consequences are especially serious for children—including U.S. citizen children—whose parents are detained or deported. Studies have shown long term, negative effects on the health development, educational outcomes, and economic stability of children. See Lisseth Rojas-Flores, et al., [Trauma and Psychological Distress in Latino Citizen Children Following Parental Detention and Deportation](#), Psychological Trauma (May 2017); Randy Capps, et al., Migration Policy Institute, [Deferred Action for Unauthorized Immigrant Parents: Analysis of DAPA's Potential Effects on Families and Children](#) (Feb. 2016) (finding that families lost 40 to 90 percent of their income, or an average of 70 percent, within six months of a parent's immigration-related arrest, detention, or deportation).
- 27 See [Statement on the Effects of Deportation and Forced Separation on Immigrants, their Families, and Communities: A Policy Statement by the Society for Community Research and Action: Division 27 of the American Psychological Association](#), American Journal of Community Psychology (Sept. 2018).
- 28 See Juan Borger, ["US ICE Officers 'Used Torture to Make Africans Sign Own Deportation Orders,'" The Guardian](#) (Oct. 22, 2020); Caitlin Dickerson, Seth Freed Wessler, Miriam Jordan, ["Immigrants Say They Were Pressured into Unneeded Surgeries," N.Y. Times](#) (Sept. 29, 2020); Staff Report, Committee on Oversight and Reform and Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, U.S. House of Representatives, [The Trump Administration's Mistreatment of Detained Immigrants: Deaths and Deficient Medical Care by For-Profit Detention Contractors](#) (Sept. 2020).
- 29 *Ng Fung Ho v. White*, 259 U.S. 276, 284 (1922).
- 30 Ingrid V. Eagly & Steven Shafer, [A National Study of Access to Counsel in Immigration Court](#), U. Penn. Law Review (Dec. 2015) (finding that even after controlling for all other factors—such as detention, jurisdiction, status, etc.—immigrants with legal representation were fifteen times more likely than those without to seek relief, and five-and-a-half times more likely to obtain such relief from removal).
- 31 See Jennifer Stave, Vera Institute, [Evaluation of the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project: Assessing the Impact of Legal Representation on Family and Community Unity](#) (Nov. 2017).
- 32 See Giovanni Peri, Cato Institute, [The Impact of Immigration on Wages of Unskilled Workers](#) (Fall 2017), (showing that immigration is not associated with wage declines for noncollege workers, and that higher immigration is associated with higher average wages).
- 33 Immigrants own more than 1 in 5 small businesses, and 1 out of every 5 Fortune 500 company was founded by a foreign-born individual. See Robert W. Fairlie et al., Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, [2016 Kauffman Index of Main Street Entrepreneurship](#), (2016); New American Economy Research Fund, [New American Fortune 500 in 2018: The Entrepreneurial Legacy of Immigrants and Their Children](#) (Oct. 10, 2018).
- 34 New American Economy, [Entrepreneurship](#).
- 35 New American Economy Research Fund, [Not Coming to America: Falling Behind in the Race to Attract International Students](#) (Jul. 9, 2020).
- 36 Eduardo Porter, ["Short of Workers, U.S. Builders and Farmers Crave More Immigrants," N.Y. Times](#) (Apr. 3, 2019).
- 37 Approximately 25% of workers in farming, fishing, and forestry occupations are undocumented, as are 16% of workers in construction and extraction occupations; 15% of workers in building and grounds cleaning and maintenance occupations; 8.7% of workers in food preparation and serving-related occupations; 7.7% of workers in production occupations; and 5.6% of workers in transportation and material moving occupations. See Nicole Prchal Svajlenka, Center for American Progress, [Protecting Undocumented Workers on the Pandemic's Front Lines](#) (Dec. 2, 2020).

- 38 Immigration is projected to drive growth in the U.S. working-age population through at least 2035, and without immigrants, the country would face a labor shortage. See Jeffrey S. Passel & D'Vera Cohn, Pew Research Center, [Immigration Projected to Drive Growth in U.S. Working-Age Population Through at Least 2035](#) (Mar. 8, 2017); see also Ryan Allen, [Immigrants and Minnesota's Workforce Report](#) (Jan. 2017) (predicting that Minnesota's population and labor force growth will slow without a substantial increase in migration to the state, making it more challenging to fill job vacancies).
- 39 Tom K. Wong, et al., U.S. Immigration Policy Center, UC San Diego, [The Impact of Interior Immigration Enforcement on the Day-to-Day Behaviors of Undocumented Immigrants](#) (April 3, 2019) (also providing literature review of how restrictive state/local policies affect health-seeking behaviors of immigrant residents). See also Rob Arthur, "Latinos in Three Cities are Reporting Fewer Crimes Since Trump Took Office," [FiveThirtyEight.com](#) (May 18, 2017); Nik Theodore, [Insecure Communities: Latino Perceptions of Police Involvement in Immigration Enforcement](#) (2013).
- 40 Immigrant Legal Resource Center, [Growing the Resistance: How Sanctuary Laws and Policies Have Flourished During the Trump Administration](#) (Dec. 2019) (analyzing county-level policies nationwide regarding assistance with federal immigration enforcement).
- 41 See also Major Cities' Chiefs Association, [Immigration Policy](#) (2013).
- 42 Benjamin Gonzalez O'Brien, Loren Collingwood, Stephen Omar El-Khatib, [The Politics of Refuge: Sanctuary Cities, Crime, and Undocumented Immigration](#), *Urban Affairs Review*, Vol. 55 (2017) (finding evidence that local "sanctuary" policies have no effect on crime despite narratives to the contrary); Tom K. Wong, Center for American Progress, [The Effects of Sanctuary Policies on Crime and the Economy](#) (Jan. 26, 2017). See also David K. Hausman, [Sanctuary Policies Reduce Deportations Without Increasing Crime](#), *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, vol. 117 no. 44 (Nov. 3, 2020).
- 43 Beth Fertig, "Immigration Arrest Tactics Come under Scrutiny for Mimicking NYPD," [Gothamist](#) (Oct. 28, 2020); Doug Smith, "Los Angeles Officials Urge ICE Agents to Stop Identifying Themselves as Police," [L.A. Times](#) (Feb. 23, 2017).
- 44 See Maddie Hana, "Concern Rises Following ICE Arrest of Mother after She Dropped off Child at South Philly School," [Philadelphia Inquirer](#) (Feb. 18, 2020); Wes Parnell, Rocco Parascandola, Thomas Tracy, Larry McShane, "ICE Agents, While Arresting Undocumented Mexican Immigrant, Wind up Shooting Second Man in Wild Brooklyn Street Brawl," [N.Y. Daily News](#) (Feb. 6, 2020); David Brand, "Pregnant Mother Arrested by ICE at Queens Family Court Is Sick and Isolated in NJ Jail," [Queens Daily Eagle](#) (June 19, 2019); Editorial Board, "ICE's Reckless Charlotte Arrests," [Charlotte Observer](#) (Jan. 18, 2019); Heidi Glenn, "Fear of Deportation Spurs 4 Women to Drop Domestic Abuse Cases in Denver," [NPR Morning Edition](#) (March 21, 2017). See also ICE Out of Courts Coalition, [Safeguarding the Integrity of our Courts: The Impact of ICE Courthouse Operations in New York State](#) (2019).
- 45 See "The Number of International Migrants Reaches 272 Million, Continuing an Upward Trend in All World Regions, Says UN," [United Nations Dep't of Economic and Social Affairs, News](#) (Sept. 17, 2019).
- 46 See New American Economy, [From Struggle to Resilience: The Economic Impact of Refugees in America](#) (Jun. 2017) ("Recent estimates have indicated that by 2030, 20.3% of the U.S. population will be older than age 65, up from just 12.4% in 2000. Refugees can help lessen the anticipated strain this will place on our workforce and entitlement programs. An estimated 77.1% of refugees are working-age, compared to the just 49.7% of the U.S.-born population.").
- 47 Madeline Buiano & Susan Ferriss, The Center for Public Integrity, [Data Defies Trump's Claims that Refugees and Asylees Burden Taxpayers](#) (May 8, 2019) ("Researchers found that between 2005 and 2014, refugees and asylees here from 1980 on contributed \$63 billion more to government revenues than they used in public services.").
- 48 See, e.g., Susan Hartman, "A New Life for Refugees, and the City They Adopted," [N.Y. Times](#) (Aug. 10, 2014), ("[A]s many as one-fourth of Utica's population of 62,000 is made up of refugee families The immigrants have been an economic engine for the city, starting small businesses, buying and renovating down-at-the-heels houses and injecting a sense of vitality to forlorn city streets."); Michelle Jamrisko & Eric Englert, "Trump May Not Want Refugees, but Rust Belt Mayors Do," [Bloomberg News](#) (Mar. 17, 2017), (In St. Louis, "residents credit Bosnian refugees with opening restaurants, buying vacant homes, and turning around a South City neighborhood once ridden with crime.").
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- 50 See Matthew La Corte, Niskanen Center, [Refugees are Revitalizing Some Great American Cities Facing Decline](#) (Jun. 21, 2016).
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- 52 See Katherin C. McKenzie, et al., [Eliminating Asylum: The Effects of Trump Administration Policies](#), *Health and Human Rights Journal* (Aug. 24, 2020).
- 53 See Tiffany Hu, "Law Profs. States Urge 9th Circ. To Block Trump Asylum Rule," [Law360](#) (May 16, 2019), ("[M]ore than a dozen states and 21 localities filed two amicus briefs urging the Ninth Circuit to affirm the lower court injunction. Both briefs focused on the public health of immigrant communities....").