Sign On: Immigrants' Rights Agenda

Friends -

Over the past two years, dozens of immigrants rights groups across the state developed a proactive agenda that we could work with a potential Whitmer Administration to enact. Importantly, most of these ideas can be accomplished administratively.

Now is the time to start working together!

Please sign on to show your support for these priorities. Deadline is COB February 20th.

This sign on is intended for organizational leaders.

Summary of policy priorities, with full text below:

1) Invitation to Address the National Immigrant Integration Conference in Detroit Oct. 20 - 22

2) New American Dreams Fund: Invest $5 to $10 million in an immigrant integration fund to support community-based ESL and citizenship programs.

3) End Michigan State Police and Department of Corrections collaboration with ICE without a judicial warrant.

4) End Michigan State Police use of Border Patrol agents as translators.

5) Recognize Municipal ID’s for state business and law enforcement purposes

6) Expand Access to Drivers Licenses

Honorable Governor Gretchen Whitmer -

Congratulations on your historic victory. We the undersigned community groups and leaders look forward to working cooperatively together with you to advance a positive, progressive vision for our state. We are committed to a collaborative approach that will yield strong public policy and strong communities.

In this letter, we are particularly concerned with the rights of immigrant families and workers. As you know, immigrants have made immense contributions to our state but are currently under particular threat.

Below, we outline several priorities, several of which we discussed with you during the campaign.
1) Invitation to Address the National Immigrant Integration Conference in Detroit Oct. 20 - 22

First, we would like to invite you to attend and address the National Immigrant Integration Conference (NIIC), the world’s largest immigrants rights and integration convening, which will be held Oct. 20-22 at Cobo Hall in Detroit. The event is being co-hosted by ACCESS, Michigan United, and the Michigan Immigrants Rights Center, and is organized nationally by the National Partnership for New Americans. The conference focuses on the full inclusion of immigrant communities in our society, and addresses a variety of topics, including access to English language instruction, workforce development, health care, women’s issues, citizenship, and legal services.

We expect 1000 - 2000 attendees and national media attention. We will also be inviting presidential candidates.

Addressing the NIIC will be an incredible opportunity to highlight the great work that Governor Whitmer will have undertaken to make Michigan a more welcoming and pro-immigrant state.

You can find out more about past NIIC conferences at www.partnershipfornewamericans.org

2) New American Dreams Fund: Invest $5 to $10 million in an immigrant integration fund to support community-based ESL and citizenship programs.

Immigrant communities make important contributions to our society, economy, and communities. As newcomers from all across the world have allowed our state to prosper, it’s time to invest in their full inclusion.

The New American Dreams Fund is modeled on similar successful efforts in Illinois, New York and California.

We propose a $5 to $10 million fund, which would support community organizations providing services in two critical areas: English language instruction (ESL) and citizenship promotion.

English proficiency is the gateway to better job and education opportunities, and full inclusion in our society. It is the number one service that immigrants want greater access to. Unfortunately, we have dramatically under-invested in ESL, especially for adult workers and parents. For example, there are 300,000 limited-English-proficient adults in the Detroit metro area, and less than 1000 annual ESL seats available. Community-based organizations and community colleges are well-placed to serve this need.

We do not believe that immigrants should have to learn English. Rather, we want to ensure that all those who wish to learn English are able to do so.

Citizenship is another important gateway. There are approximately 130,000 immigrants in Michigan eligible to naturalize and obtain their citizenship today, if only they were provided with sufficient resources. Naturalization is a costly process, which entails civics and English classes, a $700 application fee, fees to attorneys, and time off work for interviews, tests, and biometric appointments. These challenges could be viewed as a form of voter suppresion.
When immigrants obtain their citizenship, their earning potential increases by 13%. They are more likely to make large purchases, like houses or cars. They are eligible for government jobs and public benefits. Importantly, they are shielded from deportation and can provide protection to family members.

We request that $5 to $10 million for this project be allocated in the Governor’s budget proposal to the legislature.

3) End Michigan State Police and Department of Corrections collaboration with ICE without a judicial warrant.

ICE often attempts to detain immigrants who are in law enforcement even for minor issues by issuing 48-hour detainers. These detainers are requests, have not been authorized by a judge, and do not carry legal authority. Nine different court cases have found that immigration detainers are unconstitutional as since they violate immigrants right to due process.

Through the use of detainers, ICE seeks to turn our local law enforcement agencies into the front door of the deportation process. This has the effect of using local tax dollars for a purpose for which they were never intended-- enforcing federal immigration laws. Further, cooperating with ICE breaks down trust between immigrant communities and law enforcement. If immigrants fear that interactions with the local or state police could end in deportation, they will be less likely to report crimes, provide information to law enforcement investigations, or act as witnesses. This makes us all less safe.

Due to these concerns, hundreds of jurisdictions across the country have put limits on ICE detainers, including Chicago, Los Angeles, Newark, Seattle, New York City, the State of California, and the State of Connecticut. In Michigan, the Wayne County Sheriff recently implemented a policy refusing to honor ICE detainers without a judicial warrant.

As we discussed, our request is that the Michigan State Police and Department of Corrections cease to honor ICE immigration detainers without a judicial warrant.

4) End Michigan State Police use of Border Patrol agents as translators

The Michigan State Police has access to a 24-hour language translation service, yet many officers still call upon US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers to act as translators during simple traffic stops.

The use of CBP as translators can turn a simple traffic stop into a deportation.

This practice breaks down trust between community members and law enforcement, and makes them less likely to report crimes. Additionally, CBP officers are often not even properly trained or certified as translators.

As a border state, Michigan has a high presence of CBP officers, particularly in the Latino and Arab-American neighborhoods near the Ambassador Bridge. Community concerns about profiling by CBP are persistent.
As we discussed, our request is that the Michigan State Police end the use of CBP officers for translation during day-to-day law enforcement operations, especially traffic stops.

5) Recognize Municipal ID’s for state business and law enforcement purposes

The ability to obtain valid identification is a major barrier for many immigrants in Michigan ever since the state restricted our drivers license law in 2008.

Without a valid ID, it is often difficult to access basic financial, business, government, and health services. Enrolling your children in school or opening a bank account transform from simple errands into difficult barriers.

Worst of all, lack of identification can transform casual encounters with law enforcement into deportation. For example, if a law enforcement officer cannot determine the identity of someone during a traffic stop or encounter on the street, they may detain them until identity can be established. This is to ensure that no warrants are out for the person’s arrest. This detention can then trigger immigration proceedings due to the interconnection between the FBI and DHS databases used for identity checks.

To ensure that all members of our communities can fully participate in society and avoid unnecessary entanglements with law enforcement, several local municipalities have created their own government ID’s, including Detroit, Washtenaw County, and Lansing. These ID’s are secure and reliable.

Per our earlier discussion, we are requesting that state government recognize municipal ID’s for the purposes of establishing identity. This would not confer benefits that an immigrant would not otherwise be eligible for, but would rather allow them to clearly identify themselves to state agencies and law enforcement. Recognition of municipal ID’s would not confer driving privileges, for example.

6) Expand Access to Drivers Licenses

Access to a drivers license is critical in a state like Michigan with limited public transit. Since our law was changed in 2008, many have been forced to drive without proper licenses, registration, or insurance. This situation benefits no one. Driving to work can fill an immigrant with dread, and a minor fender-bender can start the deportation process. The state is deprived of registration revenue, and no one benefits when drivers are uninsured.

We can ensure that everyone on our roads is properly licensed, tested, and insured by expanding access to drivers licenses.

We understand that this project will require the support of the legislature, which at the moment is hostile. Therefore, we ask for the creation of a task force or commission, in partnership with the Secretary of State. The commission could review our driving laws and make recommendations to the legislature and executive branch as to how we could expand access to licenses and also improve safety and accountability on our roads.

* Required

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