



April 8, 2024

To the Honorable City Council President, Nick Mosby and
Members of the Baltimore City Council
Room 409, City Hall
100 N. Holliday Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

Re: City Council Bill 23-0438 –Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs – Establishment

The Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs (MIMA) is herein reporting on City Council Bill 23-0438 – Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs – Establishment.

As of 2021, approximately 50,000 foreign-born immigrants called Baltimore home. More than 17,000 have arrived since 2010 and the largest group came from Latin American countries, including substantial populations from Mexico, El Salvador, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and growing numbers from South America. While the Hispanic community is spread throughout many neighborhoods in the city, they are heavily clustered east of downtown around Patterson Park, Highlandtown, and Armistead Gardens. The City also has more than 13,000 immigrants from Asia, with significant populations from China, Korea, India, and the Philippines. Baltimore’s Asian populations are clustered around Johns Hopkins’ Homewood and medical campuses, as well as in downtown and midtown. The African foreign-born population stands at 8,169, with a significant population from Nigeria. In addition to immigrants, the city has a growing refugee community being resettled by various non-profit organizations in neighborhoods such as Reservoir Hill, Moravia, and Frankford

Also, Baltimore City is home to almost 54,000 individuals (9.3% of the city’s population) who speak a language other than English at home, and over 20,000 of those individuals speak English less than very well.¹ These individuals are *Limited English Proficient* (LEP), meaning that they do not speak English as their primary language and have limited ability to speak, write, or understand English.² Currently, the top five languages spoken by LEP individuals in Baltimore are: Spanish or Spanish Creole (8,837), Chinese (1,425), French (1,356), Korean (839), & Arabic (1,581).³

Immigrants bring diverse perspectives, skills, and experiences that enrich our City, but they also face unique challenges as they settle into a new home. In order to better serve this growing demographic and uphold our commitment to equity, inclusivity and diversity, it is imperative that we institutionalize MIMA.

MIMA’s mission is to promote the economic growth, community wellbeing and the integration of the approximately 50,000 foreign born individuals living in Baltimore City.

MIMA’s responsibilities include but are not limited to the following: advise the Mayor and Senior staff on matters related to foreign born communities; provide technical assistance to City agencies; source of information for Limited English Proficient (LEP) residents; manage the City’s language access program;

¹ [American Community Survey 2021 5-yr estimates](#)

² Definition from [LEP.gov](#)

³ [American Community Survey 2021 5-yr estimates](#)

communications and outreach of ethnic civic groups; advocacy; and respond to the needs of immigrants based on changes at the federal level.

The existence of MIMA has been critical to address the needs of New Americans moving to the City of Baltimore.

Rationale:

1. **Technical Assistance and Comprehensive Support:** Over the years, MIMA has served as a hub where City agencies can access information and resources related to demographics, language access, training, outreach strategies, messaging and communications, information dissemination, ethnic media, best practices, policies, and more. MIMA's work is to ensure that local government agencies are culturally competent and sensitive to the needs of immigrant communities as programs and services are developed and implemented.
2. **Messaging and Communications:** Clear communication is vital for both immigrants and the City of Baltimore. One of MIMA's roles is to facilitate communication tailored to immigrants' needs, ensuring that information about policies, events, and opportunities is accessible and understandable in the City's five core languages. This is critical as a third of the City's foreign-born population cannot read, write or speak English. MIMA employs various communication channels to keep communities informed such as a monthly newsletter, social media, biweekly community stakeholder calls, community events and collaborations with immigrant focused CBOs.
3. **Community Building and Engagement:** Immigrants often seek a sense of belonging and community in their new home. In response, MIMA coordinates community engagement and promotes civic participation, helping immigrants become active members of society. This includes organizing events, conducting outreach activities, hosting a civics academy program, soliciting input regarding local government programs, and staffing multiple community workgroups such as the Baltimore City Hispanic Commission, Language Access Oversight Committee, MIMA's Community Advisory Board, and the Asian American and Pacifica Island Workgroup.
4. **Language Access and Federal Compliance:** Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination based on national origin, which is interpreted to include language. In practice, City agencies must make a reasonable effort to provide access to services to the nearly 20,000 individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) living in Baltimore City. Since 2019, MIMA has been working with a number of City agencies receiving federal funds to achieve compliance. To that end, MIMA has secured funding to hire a Language Access Coordinator assist agencies with this federal requirement. Also, MIMA has developed and centralized language access resources (telephonic interpretation, written translation and training) for City employees to overcome language barriers when serving residents whose English is not their first language.
5. **Advocacy and Policy Development:** Codifying this office demonstrates our commitment to advocating for the rights and interests of immigrants. Over the years, MIMA has advocated for policies that benefit immigrants and has engaged in research and analysis to better understand the needs of immigrant communities. In this role, MIMA has informed



the development of more inclusive and effective policies and processes at the local, state, and federal level.

Benefits:

1. **Improved Integration:** By providing targeted resources, language support, and cultural integration programs, we ensure that immigrants can more effectively contribute to our City and society at large.
2. **Strengthened Relationships:** Codifying MIMA demonstrates our dedication to equity, diversity and inclusivity, fostering positive relationships with immigrant communities, faith-based institutions, and CBOs.
3. **Cultural Diversity and Innovation:** Immigrants bring unique perspectives, skills and cultural contributions to our City. This diversity can lead to increased innovation (i.e. start businesses and developing ethnic business enclaves) that can benefit our local economy.
4. **Soften Population Decline:** The presence of an immigrant community can create economic and social opportunities that can attract other immigrants to our City. In Baltimore, the immigrant population has been a consistent source of growth, mitigating overall population loss. From 2010 to 2021, the city's foreign-born population grew by over 4,571 people, a 9% growth rate compared to an overall population decrease of 44,000 people in the same period.

MIMA's codification is a strategic step that aligns with our City's values and commitment to equity and diversity. This office will serve as a hub for technical assistance, immigrant support, engagement, information, and advocacy, ultimately benefiting the City of Baltimore, our immigrant residents, and the broader community.

The Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs supports City Council Bill 23-0438.

For additional questions or concerns, contact:

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