September 19, 2025

Dear Members of the Commission Streamlining Task Force,

On behalf of the Immigrant Rights Commission, I am writing to express our support for maintaining the Immigrant Rights Commission as an independent body and to emphasize the importance of our work in elevating immigrants' perspectives on policy issues and civic engagement.

The Immigrant Rights Commission serves as an independent policy body to inform the Mayor and Board of Supervisors on issues and policies affecting San Francisco's immigrant residents and workforce. Since the inception of the Immigrant Rights Commission, we have been championing language access, fostering civic participation, and identifying strategies to make City services more accessible to all residents, regardless of immigration status.

With the support of the Office of Civic Engagement Affairs (OCEIA), the Immigrant Rights Commission publishes annual reports highlighting accomplishments and identifying key issues affecting San Francisco's diverse immigrant communities. The San Francisco Immigrant Rights Commission has made historic contributions that set it apart nationwide. It played a critical role in shaping San Francisco's Due Process for All Ordinance and defending San Francisco's sanctuary city policies, ensuring that all residents, regardless of immigration status, feel comfortable calling the Police and Fire Departments during emergencies and cooperating with City agencies during public safety situations. The commission has also been instrumental in advancing language access, helping establish one of the first comprehensive Language Access Ordinances in the United States, which guarantees fair language access across all City departments that serve the public. In addition, it has consistently uplifted immigrant voices by holding community hearings that directly shaped citywide policy—such as protections for immigrant workers, expanded access to health care regardless of status, and the defense of immigrant-serving nonprofits during budget cuts. These contributions not only safeguard immigrant communities in San Francisco but also set a model for other cities nationwide.

This year, we have placed a strong emphasis on uplifting civic engagement. In January, we held a special hearing focused on the incoming federal administration's plans for immigration policy, how this will impact San Francisco, and what actions the City and community are taking to prepare. Since then, we have convened presentations on other critical topics, from the travel ban to language access, creating opportunities for community members to share their experiences and needs during these uncertain times.

As the Commission Streamlining Task Force deliberates on the criteria to assess the City's various policy bodies and develops recommendations pursuant to guidelines stipulated by Proposition E, we respectfully ask for the preservation of the Immigrant Rights Commission to ensure that we continue to represent and shape inclusive City policies that are responsive to the needs of our immigrant communities.

Thank you for your work, leadership, and service in ensuring the efficiency of our local government.

Sincerely,

Sarah Souza, Chair

**Immigrant Rights Commission** 

# A San Francisco FOR ALL

## SAN FRANCISCO IMMIGRANT RIGHTS COMMISSION

REPORT 2025





## San Francisco residents is an immigrant.

With **34%** of its residents born outside of the U.S., San Francisco remains one of the most **culturally and linguistically diverse** cities in the country.

**Source:** United States Census Bureau's 2019-2023 American Community Survey from the 2025 Language Access Compliance Summary Report

## **OUR HISTORY**

Founded in 1997, the San Francisco Immigrant Rights Commission (IRC) is one of the first commissions of its kind in the nation. Composed of 15 voting members, the IRC advises the Mayor and Board of Supervisors on policies that impact San Francisco's immigrant residents and workers.

For over two decades, the IRC has met with community members and played a central role in helping to shape inclusive policies that make San Francisco a national leader in immigrant and language rights. Since 2009, the IRC has been staffed by its programmatic partner, the Office of Civic Engagement & Immigrant Affairs (OCEIA).







#### **HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR HISTORY**

#### LANGUAGE ACCESS RIGHTS

In 2001, the IRC advocated for and secured the first version of the Language Access Ordinance to ensure equal access to City services for all San Franciscans, regardless of what language they spoke. With amendments made in 2009, 2015, and 2024, and oversight by OCEIA, San Francisco's Language Access Ordinance remains one of the strongest in the nation. In 2021, the IRC held a two-part series of special hearings on the Language Access Ordinance, and OCEIA conducted an 11-language community survey of Limited English Proficient (LEP) community members, to inform the Board of Supervisors and City departments on how to improve language access in San Francisco. In 2023, Supervisor Walton proposed amendments to the Language Access Ordinance, and in 2024, the amendments were passed by the Board of Supervisors and signed by the Mayor.

#### COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM

As Congress debated comprehensive immigration reform in 2009 and 2013, the IRC held a series of special hearings and policy discussions to learn how the proposed changes would impact community members. In 2013, the Commission published a report of its findings and policy recommendations. Almost all of the state and local recommendations were implemented. While comprehensive immigration reform remains a goal that only Congress can enact, the IRC continues its efforts to advance this goal with the hope of keeping families united and providing a pathway to citizenship for immigrants.

#### SANCTUARY CITY ORDINANCE

Since San Francisco's Sanctuary Ordinance was enacted in 1989, the IRC has fought to strengthen laws that promote public trust and cooperation. In 2013, the IRC endorsed the Due Process for All Ordinance, which was amended in 2016. Together, these ordinances help keep San Franciscans safe by making sure that all residents feel comfortable calling the police in emergencies and accessing City services.

#### **INCLUSIVE CITY COMMISSIONS**

The IRC was an early supporter of efforts to make City commissions truly inclusive of the people they represent and serve. The IRC supported the Board of Supervisors' Charter Amendment to allow noncitizens to serve on City boards and commissions, which was approved by San Francisco voters in November 2020.

#### A RECOVERY FOR ALL

As the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacted immigrants and communities of color, the IRC held a series of special hearings to ensure that San Francisco's recovery encompassed all of its residents, including immigrants. In 2020, the IRC held a special hearing in partnership with the Economic Recovery Task Force, and developed policy recommendations that were incorporated in the Task Force's report to the City. In 2021, the IRC held special hearings on immigrant inclusion in the COVID-19 recovery and immigrants' ability to access the services they needed in their language during the pandemic.

#### IMMIGRANT PARENT VOTING

The IRC has promoted the full civic engagement of all San Francisco residents, regardless of immigration status, including the right of noncitizen immigrant parents to vote in San Francisco School Board elections. This historic right was approved by voters in 2016 and reauthorized in 2021. When the ordinance was challenged in court in 2022, the IRC partnered with the Immigrant Parent Voting Collaborative in defense of parents' right to have a say in their children's education. The City and County of San Francisco defended Immigrant Parent Voting in court, and appealed the decision that revoked this right. In 2023, the California Court of Appeal upheld Immigrant Parent Voting in San Francisco. The decision allows noncitizen parents to continue to vote in San Francisco School Board elections.



## THE IRC TODAY

In the last year of the Biden administration, the federal government took measures to drastically restrict asylum. Following a decrease in the number of encounters at the U.S.-Mexico border, Texas stopped busing migrants to Democratic-led cities. However, U.S. immigration policy remained a top issue for many voters, and the lead-up to the presidential election saw an increase in xenophobic and anti-immigrant rhetoric. As media attention focused on the border, many immigrants who have lived here for decades continued to face uncertainty over the future of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), which has provided temporary protection from deportation and a work permit to hundreds of thousands of immigrants who were brought here as children.

This report covers the work of the IRC in 2024, as San Francisco continued to grapple with the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, and immigrants and communities of color were disproportionately impacted. Immigrants faced barriers to employment, from asylum seekers forced to wait for months to apply for a work permit, to DACA recipients who could lose their work permits if DACA comes to an end. Local service providers continued to see increases in newcomer populations, and language access remained crucial to the City's ability to provide information and services.

In response to these challenges, the IRC worked to improve language access for all San Franciscans, ensure that the City prioritized services for immigrants, and explore ways the City could open economic opportunities to all workers, regardless of immigration status.

#### **HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE PAST YEAR**

#### **CELEBRATING LOCAL IMMIGRANT LEADERS**

Hosted the Immigrant Leadership Awards celebration in honor of immigrant leaders and champions of immigrant rights, as part of the IRC's efforts to highlight the contributions and achievements of immigrants. The inaugural awards were introduced by the late Mayor Ed Lee in 2017, and in 2021, Mayor London Breed opened the first virtual awards ceremony.

#### **HONOREES FROM THE 2024 IMMIGRANT LEADERSHIP AWARDS**



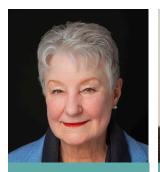
ENTREPRENEUR LEADER Márcia Treidler ABADÁ-Capoeira San Francisco



GRASSROOTS
LEADER
Sourichanh
Chanthyasack
Tenderloin Community



YOUTH
LEADER
Selamawit
Tekle Asmerom



VOLUNTEER
OF THE YEAR
Bette Kane
Stockton



VERA HAILE
CHAMPION
OF JUSTICE
Tom Ryan
SF Labor Council
AFL-CIO

#### SPECIAL RECOGNITIONS:



Carnaval
San Francisco



Nihonmachi Street Fair



Pistahan Parade & Festival



Italian Heritage Parade



**Clockwise from top left:** Vice Chair Chaudhary and Commissioner Abdou greet each other; Youth Polynesian dance group *Mixed Persuasion*; all 2024 Immigrant Leadership Awards honorees; Singer Lucia Obregon Matzer, accompanied by Arturo Mendez on guitar.

#### **ADVANCING LANGUAGE ACCESS RIGHTS**

Partnered with Supervisor Walton's Office, OCEIA, and community partners to advance the amendments to San Francisco's Language Access Ordinance (LAO), and spoke out at press conferences and hearings in support of improving language access in San Francisco. The amendments were informed in part by community input from the IRC's special hearings on language access and OCEIA's 11-language community survey of Limited English Proficient (LEP) community members. In 2024, the amendments were approved unanimously by the Board of Supervisors and signed by the Mayor.



Immigrant Rights Commissioners join Supervisor Walton's Office, OCEIA, and community partners at a press conference in support of advancing the amendments to the San Francisco Language Access Ordinance (LAO).

## OPENING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMMIGRANT WORKERS

Developed recommendations on how the City can open economic opportunities for all workers, regardless of immigration status, and wrote a letter to the Department of Human Resources requesting that the City support and sponsor its immigrant employees.

## INCLUDING IMMIGRANT PERSPECTIVES IN PLANS FOR THE FUTURE OF HOUSING IN SAN FRANCISCO

Developed recommendations and issued a resolution urging the City to address the housing needs of low-income immigrant families and seniors, and ensure that immigrant perspectives were included in the plans for the future of housing in the city.

#### **ADVOCATING FOR IMMIGRANT SERVICES**

Wrote a letter to the Mayor and Board of Supervisors highlighting the most pressing issues immigrants are facing in San Francisco, based on community testimony at IRC hearings, and asking the City to consider prioritizing services for immigrants.

#### CHAMPIONING THE EXPANSION OF MEDI-CAL

Issued a statement highlighting California's expansion of Medi-Cal to include all eligible Californians, regardless of age or immigration status, and encouraging community members to participate.

## SUPPORTING CALLS FOR A CEASEFIRE FOR HUMANITARIAN REASONS

Issued a statement supporting calling for a ceasefire for humanitarian reasons, and recognizing the rights of all affected individuals in Jewish, Muslim, Christian and all groups regardless of religious affiliation.

#### PROMOTING IMMIGRANT-OWNED SMALL BUSINESSES

Issued a resolution recognizing the importance of immigrant-owned small businesses and urging the City to address language access needs and increase support for businesses facing displacement.

#### REAFFIRMING SUPPORT FOR IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES

Issued a joint statement with OCEIA reaffirming support for immigrant communities following the 2024 election.





## RECOMMENDATIONS

## The Immigrant Rights Commission recommends that the City and County of San Francisco:

- Support inclusive policies that keep families together and treat all people, including immigrants, with dignity and respect
- Ensure that the economic recovery, in particular workforce development opportunities, includes all San Franciscans, regardless of where they were born or what language they speak
- Help keep San Franciscans in their homes by addressing the housing, nutritional, educational and health care needs of vulnerable or underserved families, including immigrants; and ensuring that immigrants' perspectives are included in such planning
- Maintain funding for immigrant-serving organizations and continue to invest in immigrants and people of color, as we see changes in our newcomer population
- Apply an inclusive racial equity lens to determine how the City's actions may impact people of color, including immigrant communities, and strive to promote equity in all forms
- Ensure that City departments implement the latest amendments to the Language Access Ordinance to address the language needs of community members; invest in language services and necessary staff to improve language access capacity; and continually work to improve language access in partnership with OCEIA

- Provide timely, accurate, in-language information, increase coordination among City departments and community partners, and highlight available resources and services to support immigrant community planning for possible policy changes by the new federal administration
- Combat anti-Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) hate through investment in assistance for survivors, prevention and intervention efforts, language access as a safety issue, resources for service providers, and models for cross-racial healing and solidarity
- Preserve affordable, quality City and community-based services for all San Franciscans
- Address the needs of LGBTQIA+ immigrants by expanding access to health care and mental health services, prioritizing safe housing and shelter for transgender immigrants, increasing funding for legal support and assistance programs, and supporting employment and training programs
- Develop and implement strategies to help Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients, asylum seekers, and other immigrant workers contribute to the city's economic growth by sponsoring workers for employment-based immigration pathways, expanding support for workers' cooperatives, business ownership, and paid fellowship and training programs, and supporting economic opportunities for all workers, regardless of their immigration status
- Uphold its tradition as a sanctuary city, where all San Franciscans can contribute and thrive

## SAN FRANCISCO IMMIGRANT RIGHTS COMMISSION

### Be informed, get engaged, and speak out!

The full Immigrant Rights Commission meets the second Monday of each month at 5:30 pm. All meetings are accessible and open to the public.

Visit <u>sf.gov/immigrantrights</u> for more information.

#### **COMMISSIONERS & STAFF**

#### **Commissioners:**

Celine Kennelly, Chair
Kudrat D. Chaudhary,
Vice Chair
Soha Abdou
Aseel Fara
Elahe Enssani
Haregu Gaime
Lucia Obregon Matzer
Yu Pok (Jose) Ng
Mario Paz
Monthanus Ratanapakdee
Jessy Ruiz
Marco Senghor
Sarah Souza
Alicia Wang

#### Former Commissioners:\*

Zay David Latt Victor Qiu Franklin M. Ricarte **Executive Committee:** Chair Kennelly, Vice Chair Chaudhary, Members Paz and Souza.

The Executive Committee meets the fourth Wednesday of each month at 5:30 pm.

#### Office of Civic Engagement & Immigrant Affairs

#### **Jorge Rivas**

Executive Director | Commission Secretary

#### **Elena Shore**

Senior Immigrant Affairs Advisor | Commission Clerk

#### Jamie L. Richardson

Senior Communications Specialist | Report Design

\*Commissioners resigned in 2024