



## **Ensuring that immigrants and refugees are not forgotten during the COVID-19 crisis**

On March 26, 2020, I BELONG organized a virtual conversation between immigrant-serving nonprofit organizations serving diverse communities in the Greater Philadelphia area. The COVID-19 crisis has forced these nonprofits to decrease the availability of vital services they offer and pushed them to adapt and offer new and extremely important services in such a situation. Immigrants are suffering from this crisis in an unfair way and these organizations are on the front lines because immigrants put their trust in them. More than direct services, we also need to advocate for the immigrant community in general and this is why I BELONG brought these organizations together and why I BELONG is advocating for the below changes to be enacted immediately.

We are sharing below common concerns and issues with potential solutions which were discussed during our meeting.

- **Racism**: We all denounce racism and the effect it has had on the Chinese community during this crisis. The increase of attacks documented in the Chinese community and the Asian community overall concerns us and we all stand with them and offer our assistance. Racism is not a seasonal issue and affects many of our immigrant neighbors. It needs to be denounced all year long.
  - Keep condemning attacks against all minorities and immigrants whenever they happen.
  - Reinforce the value of multiculturalism.
- **Information Access**: Immigrants in the Greater Philadelphia region speak a variety of languages and it is always difficult to have access to important information in a timely manner for those who do not speak English fluently. The best way to protect the immigrant community against misinformation and scams is to have official information available in various languages. Many organizations translate and offer their own documents to help our communities the best we can. We believe that more cooperation with local government would bring accurate information faster to our different communities.
  - Partner with local nonprofits to translate documents and make sure that more community members are well informed
  - Ensure that funding is set aside to fund translation, interpretation, and advocacy to diverse communities.
- **Benefits**: Immigrants need more access to information about benefits such as healthcare, unemployment and low-income benefits. Permanent residents are scared that they might be affected by the Public Charge in anything they ask from the government and undocumented immigrants fear seeking help even when they really need it. Issues like domestic violence and access to reproductive health are also harder to support with a stay-at-home order and lack of revenues. We need to reinforce our



support of the immigrant community and let them know that our region is not only welcoming, but it is also caring.

- Ensure that when policy is drafted and enforced that the needs of immigrant communities are considered throughout this process.
- Make sure that immigrants are aware of their rights.
- **Small Business:** The majority of new business-owners and entrepreneurs in the Greater Philadelphia region are immigrants. They happen to be the ones that are the most affected by the forced closures and the stay-at-home order. However, it is harder for them to access resources because of the lack of information or the lack of help to fill the required documents.
  - Reinforce the importance of immigrants in the economy.
  - Ensure that grants and loans are going to immigrants' businesses as well
- **Detention Centers:** We know that being in close quarters increases the chances of getting the virus. States like Pennsylvania and New Jersey are launching efforts to reduce their jail population. We believe that the same efforts should be made for the detention centers where immigrants are at greater risk of getting the virus.
  - Ensure that immigrants in detention centers are safe
- **Immigration:** We want to remind immigrants that even if the USCIS offices are closed, they still accept applications.
  - Reinforce to immigrants the fact that they are still able to apply and renew their visas and permanent residency.
- **Census:** The Census is very important for the city and for our communities. The COVID-19 situation makes it harder for us to make sure that everyone is counted but we are reminding our communities of its importance and we applaud the efforts of the Philly Counts team.
  - Keep working with local organizations to make sure everyone is counted.
- **Funding and allocations:** Non-profit organizations are trying to do their part in reducing the spread of the virus by staying at home, but they have had to adapt fast. And they are still figuring things out and rethinking the way they work. They had to stop some of their programs and help the community in new ways. They are all operating thanks to grants and generous donations and the new atmosphere brought by this situation makes them afraid of the future of their funding resources. When this situation will come to an end, they will need as much support as possible. Alongside their usual programs they will also need to develop new solutions for the post COVID-19 world.
  - Ensure that funding is set aside for nonprofit organizations.
  - Ensure that immigrants are not forgotten when it comes to delivering this funding.

By having this conversation and writing this document, we hope that local politicians, the different communities of Greater Philadelphia as well as the general public realize how much immigrants are important to the region. All immigrants play a part in the economy, the culture and the diversity which makes Philadelphia and the region vibrant. Let's ensure that immigrants are not forgotten during this crisis.



## **About I BELONG:**

I BELONG is a volunteer group dedicated to serving communities in the Greater Philadelphia area. We believe that raising the voices of immigrants and facilitating immigrant integration can make a better and more welcoming city. This is why we organize events and facilitate conversation to empower immigrants and promote their cultures. We are all immigrants ourselves and have graduated from the Immigrant Leadership Institute from the Welcoming Center of New Pennsylvanians.

To learn more about us, please contact us at [ibelong.philly@gmail.com](mailto:ibelong.philly@gmail.com)