

Immigrant and Refugee Commission Annual Report

June 2013-June 2014

OFFICE OF IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE AFFAIRS

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Authored by: Sahar Fathi

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The Immigrant and Refugee Commission (IRC) advises the Mayor and City Council on matters impacting immigrants and refugees living in Seattle, and supports the City of Seattle's goals of immigrant integration. The IRC is housed in the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs.

The IRC has 15 members representing a diverse array of immigrant and refugee communities. In 2013 they represented Somalia, Mexico, Eritrea, Ethiopia, China, Nepal, Lebanon, the Ukraine, and Iran. The IRC has two co-chairs and three committees: Comprehensive Immigration Reform, Education, and Affordable Care Act/Homelessness. Additionally, the IRC meets quarterly with the Human Rights Commission, Women's Commission, LGBTQ Commission and the People with DisAbilities Commission, and participates in Super Subcommittees that represent all five commissions.

The IRC meets monthly, with committees meeting as often as needed to accomplish their goals. An Annual Retreat provides the Commission an opportunity to reflect upon their accomplishments and develop a vision and work plan for the upcoming year.

Education

The Education committee was active on a variety of education related issues. This year was particularly exciting because the Seattle City Council announced their "Preschool for All" initiative. As noted by the Council, too many children cannot read at grade level in third grade and this statistic is a significant indicator for high school graduation. Data reflects this is a significant issue for African American, Native American, and immigrant and refugee students. The Education committee has been represented at meetings on this topic and provided input on this initiative.

Bilingual Education was another area of interest and the committee worked hard to understand language immersion goals in the Seattle Public School District (SPS) and to influence the SPS strategic plan. They co-hosted an event with SPS that recognized world language credit and honored students who had received high school credit for proficiency in their primary language. The application of the City's Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI) filter has been central in this work. The Commission sent a letter to SPS urging them to use the RSJI tool in their Strategic Plan and to focus on immigrant and refugee populations.

Highlights of the Education Subcommittee activities are as follows:

- Met with the Office For Education (OFE) to learn about the Request for Proposals (RFP) process and how the Commission can provide input
- Met with City Council and Mayoral staff to give recommendations on the Families and Education Levy funding
- Met with City Council to give feedback on the Preschool for All Resolution

- Met with OFE and Seattle Public School District (SPS) early learning teams to influence/inform outreach efforts to immigrant and refugee parents
- Built relationships with SPS and Superintendent Banda
- Regular contact with the Southeast Seattle Education Coalition (SESEC) staff to support their efforts and ensure that immigrant and refugee needs are well represented
- Co-sponsored the release of the Migration Policy Institute’s report: Shaping Our Futures: The Educational and Career Success of Washington State’s Immigrant Youth.

Comprehensive Immigration Reform

A key success for the Commission was the passage of Resolution 31490 in support of Federal Comprehensive Immigration Reform in 2013. The Comprehensive Immigration Reform (CIR) committee initiated and worked with the Five Commissions as well as City Council to pass the most progressive city resolution in the country in support of Federal Comprehensive Immigration Reform. The IRC was featured on Univision, along with the Human Rights Commission, and praised by Councilmember Harrell for drafting the “gold standard” of resolutions by working in collaboration with so many stakeholders.

The committee began this work by strategically laying the framework out for elected officials. In order to ensure that the resolution would be the most progressive possible, they worked with the Human Rights Commission, the LGBT Commission, the Women’s Commission and the People with DisAbilities Commission to make sure that the language was reflective of all of their priorities.

Highlights of the CIR committee activities are as follows:

- Provided a briefing document for City Council and the Mayor
- Provided an analysis of the Senate bill that recommended policy priorities for the City of Seattle
- Drafted a resolution for consideration by City Council
- Briefed City Council in a “Lunch and Learn” session, an hour long discussion between the five commissions and City Council on the topic of immigration reform and its impacts to the City of Seattle.
- Participated in presenting the resolution that was heard in the Public Safety and Civil Rights Committee, and was passed unanimously by the Full Council.

Affordable Care Act/Homelessness

Commissioners were passionate about the Affordable Care Act and homelessness and established a committee to work jointly on these issues.

Affordable Care Act (ACA)

The focus of the Commission centered on evaluating how the ACA would impact immigrants and refugees in the City of Seattle. There was great concern that immigrants and refugees would not have access to information and support in signing up by the deadline. After doing extensive research and meeting with local community based organizations and Seattle King County Public Health, the committee

- Developed an informational document about the ACA which described the law, clarified the implications of the law for documented and undocumented immigrants, and provided resources for additional help.

- Seattle King County Public Health worked closely with the committee to approve the language utilized in the document and are now using it as part of their outreach.
- Hosted a televised question and answer (“Q & A”) session with local Public Health officials to address questions and clarify confusions on the ACA. They collaborated with the Women’s Commission on this component, and Seattle Channel assisted in taping. The 30 minute video was then posted online and shared with ethnic media and the public.

Homelessness

The committee was particularly concerned about homeless immigrants and refugees, and the barriers faced by this vulnerable population. Through their research they found that bilingual resources were limited and shelters and resources did not address the specific needs of the immigrant and refugee homeless. The committee has developed an in-depth understanding of the barriers to ending homelessness and the various initiatives that have been created over time to handle this issue. They are poised to continue their work with city officials, shelters, and community members to come up with solutions for immigrants and refugees facing homelessness. The committee:

- Met with experts in the field as well as Councilmembers, to explain their purpose and track down additional resources.
- Compiled a list of shelters and resources that were culturally and linguistically appropriate for the immigrant and refugee community, but were disappointed by the general lack of assistance for this particular population’s needs.
- Worked with the five commissions through the Homelessness Super Subcommittee to continue brainstorming solutions for the most vulnerable homeless populations.

Advocacy & Input

The IRC is frequently called upon by the Mayor's Office and Seattle City Council to provide input on policies and legislation. In addition to the input provided through the committee focus areas in 2013, the IRC was asked for feedback and recommendations on the following:

- Ordinance 124441, establishing a pilot program for transportation network companies and affiliated drivers and vehicles. This legislation was heard in the Council’s Committee on Taxi, For-Hire, and Limousine Regulations. The Commission drafted recommendations that were then sent to the Councilmembers and the Mayor, met with Councilmembers upon request, and developed testimony for the final Committee meeting. Additionally, they have been working on some recommendations for data collection during the pilot phase of implementation of the Ordinance.

The IRC wrote letters of support on various issues that impact immigrant and refugee residents of Seattle.

- Funding initiatives in the Parks Legacy Plan
- Fair contracts for Seattle Space Needle workers
- Detainees fasting at the Tacoma Detention Center
- Support of the Seattle World School

Commissioners: June 2013-June 2014

Shree Ram Dahal came to the United States as a student and has lived in Seattle area since 1999. Due to personal experiences of living in different places and the desire to stay socially connected, Shree understands the difficulties immigrant and refugee communities go through during the process of adjustment in a new country. Actively involved with Nepal Seattle Society (NSS) and representing and advocating for a community of people of Nepali origin and friends of Nepal in Seattle area and Washington State, Shree is president of NSS. NSS regularly advise new members on various personal and social issues during their adjustment in the community. Through NSS Shree interacts with other communities in the region and is also a Board member of Association of Nepali in America and a regional Delegate to Non-Resident Nepali Association - America. Both of these organizations operate on national and international level to serve the interest of the people of Nepali origin.

Jeniffer Calleja, originally from Sinaloa, Mexico, has worked in social research and community development for over 10 years. Since moving to Seattle, she has worked on issues of health equity, employment and labor, and civic engagement with low income community members, a majority of whom are immigrants and refugees. She is passionate about empowering underrepresented individuals and communities to make their voices heard and participate in local decision-making processes from reporting a broken street light to pursuing complex policy changes. Currently, she works at Neighborhood House on a project to address health disparities in public housing communities. In this work, Jeniffer supported immigrant women requesting single gender swimming lessons at a local pool, resulting in the City of Seattle and two private pools adopting the program and improving access to health and water safety to hundreds of primarily immigrant women for whom co-ed swimming was not an alternative. Jeniffer holds a Master's Degree in Public Administration from the University of Washington and B.A. in Government and Political Studies from the University of Guadalajara. Her free time is dedicated to walking Seattle beaches and hills, swimming, spending time with family and friends, and cooking.

Devon Alisa Abdallah, PhD, is a Pacific Northwest native of Lebanese descent on her father's side and a fourth generation Arab American. A community activist, Devon is a founding member and past secretary of the Arab American Community Coalition - a civil rights organization founded after September 11th, a past Board Member of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) Seattle Chapter, and a past Advisory Board Member of the Iraqi Community Center. For the City of Seattle, Devon was one of the original members of the Race and Social Justice Community Roundtable and a Commissioner for Immigrant & Refugee Commission for six years, three of which she was the Co-Chair. She is also a former Community Organizer (2002-2003) for the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Washington having worked primarily on civil rights issues related to the aftermath of September 11th. Devon has spoken on numerous panels, workshops and forums on civil rights, social justice, and the Arab American community since September 11th. Devon enjoys research, is a published author, and holds a master's degree from the London School of Economics, as well as a PhD in Organizational Psychology from Alliant International University, California School of Organizational Studies.

Simon Khin is one of the leaders of the fastest growing refugee populations in the US - that of Burma. Along with his family, he immigrated to the Seattle area in 1977 from Burma. He completed a BA in Architecture from University of Washington, BS in Electrical Engineering from Seattle Pacific University and Masters Certificate in Technology Management from City University. He is the Founder and President of Northwest Communities of Burma. Since the late 90's, Simon volunteered at refugee camps at Thai-Burma border and advocated for refugees even while working as a software engineer in the corporate world. He continues to serve his community by advocating for understanding between ethnic groups from Burma as well as with larger Seattle community. In July

2012, Simon was recognized for his work with refugee populations with the Spirit of Liberty award at the Fourth of July naturalization ceremony at the Seattle Center. In September 2012, he was honored to be personally invited by Burmese Nobel Peace Laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi for her Congressional Gold medal award ceremony at the Washington, DC Congressional Rotunda.

Mariya Kochubey - Mariya Kochubey earned her Bachelor's degree in Biology from the University of Washington, and volunteered as a Russian to English interpreter with the Global Family Alliance for five years. During her time as a student she fundraised for and traveled to a rural community in Ecuador to help build homes. She currently works for Gryffin Consulting where she provides assistance in regards business and accounting consulting to entrepreneurs and businesses around the Puget Sound. Mariya immigrated to the United States from Ukraine as a young child, and watching her parents struggle to provide a better life for her greatly impacted her. It has made her passionate in bringing awareness to the needs and problems these communities face and helping other immigrants discover the opportunities and services available to them.

Justin Chan is the Manager of Corporate Services, Marketing, & Communications at the Northwest Mountain Minority Supplier Development Council. He is a community leader and advocate who has been involved on various campaigns with thorough experience in public policy, outreach, PR, graphic design and social media. He previously served as the Legislative Assistant to Seattle City Councilmember Sally Bagshaw, and as the Interim Director and Executive Assistant to the Washington State Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs. He enjoys watching and playing sports and spending time with his family and yellow Labrador Homer.

Michael T. Neguse is a trusted leader in the East African community and has worked in tandem with the City of Seattle on several projects related to housing, mental health and crime prevention. Michael is a community organizer working with all people in his community, whether it be mentoring at-risk youth, offering translation and facilitating conflict resolution among differing ethnic groups, or teaching English as a Second Language for seniors. Seattle Human Rights Day Award Winner of 2008, Michael also offers guidance for newly-arrived immigrants seeking employment and teaches U.S. Citizenship in Amharic and Tigrigna. Michael serves as Crime Prevention Coordinator with Seattle Police Department providing crime prevention and outreach services to Seattle's African immigrant communities, as well as to East African immigrants to provide information about crime prevention to parents and youth. He also recruits residents to participate in SPD's East African Advisory Council and with the African/African American Unity Group. Michael speaks many languages including Amharic, Tigrinya, Somali, and Arabic.

Roxana Norouzi has over a decade of experience in advocacy and social justice work with immigrant and refugee populations in the Seattle area. Currently, she provides strategic guidance around education policy and implementation for OneAmerica, an immigrant right's organization serving Washington state. Her professional background includes working as an advocate for low-income families in Seattle and providing cultural competency trainings to public schools and community based organizations. Roxana serves on the board of the Children's Alliance as well as the Seattle Globalist. She holds a Master's Degree in Social Work from the University of Washington and in 2010 was awarded the Bonderman Fellowship which allowed her to travel independently to the Middle East, India, Southeast Asia, East Africa, West Africa, and South America exploring identity shifts and migration trends in the developing world. Roxana is fluent in Farsi (Persian) and her experience as a first generation American informs her passion and commitment to justice and immigrant rights.

Tsegaba Woldehaimanot holds a Masters in Social Work degree from the University of Washington and has over seven years of experience in the field of mental health, including working as a mental health therapist providing therapeutic services to children and adults. Tsegaba was born in Sudan where her family took refuge after fleeing their homeland of Eritrea because of war and violence. She and her family later migrated to America as refugees to make

better lives for themselves. Witnessing first-hand the challenges faced by many refugees, Tsegaba has long been interested in issues of emotional distress in refugee populations, and how communities can best meet those needs. She is well-acquainted with both the local refugee community and community mental health system. Tsegaba currently works at Asian Counseling and Referral Service as the Outreach Coordinator for the Pathways to Wellness Project. She reaches out to various refugee communities to learn the emotional and mental needs of their members working to connect them to appropriate resources. She also connects with local mental health agencies interested in increasing their capacity to serve this community.

Mohamed Sheikh Hassan, a long-standing leader in the community and founder and Director of Afrique Service Center in Rainier Valley, with the relationships and trust to bring the African immigrant and refugee communities to the table where their issues and concerns can be addressed and their talents can be shared. Mohamed has worked tirelessly to strengthen the base of immigrants and refugees in King County through community organizing, building grassroots leadership, and advocating for issues that are very important for resources within the community. Currently, Mohamed is a Community Jobs Program Coordinator assisting refugees from Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe in partnership with the Department of Social Health services, the program assists clients in obtaining employment, budgeting skills, and guidance for social issues related to immigration. Mohamed is multi-lingual in English, Somali, Arabic, and Swahili.

Habtamu Abdi (B.A., LL.M.), originally from Ethiopia, East Africa, is a young activist and a well-respected community leader among East African refugees and immigrants in Northwest. A social worker and community advocate, Habtamu is a founding member and program coordinator of The Center for East African Community Affairs (CEACA), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization serving immigrants and refugees in Seattle. For the City of Seattle, Habtamu is an active board member on the Immigrant & Refugee Commission and a member of the Race and Social Justice Community Roundtable, and a Public Outreach and Engagement Liaison (POEL) with the Department of Neighborhoods. Habtamu holds two master degrees in Human Rights Law (From St. Thomas University in Miami Florida graduated with Cum laude) and a second master degree in Laws of International Sustainable Development from the University of Washington. Among his many awards as an advocate for human rights are the 2006 best essay of the year from Pastoralists' Concern Association Ethiopia (PCAEE), the 2009 Siegfried Wiessner Human Rights Award from St. Thomas University in Miami, the Crouch-Kielsgard Human Rights Scholarship award winner of the year, First Place Arya Laghaie Human Rights award winner of the year in 2009 and William Gates Scholarship winner at the University of Washington School of Law in 2010.

Dori Cahn is a teacher, writer, and advocate working with immigrants and refugees. A native-born New Yorker, she grew up in an extended family of Eastern European immigrants. Her Master's degree focused on environment and development in Latin America, which she later taught at the University of Washington and The Evergreen State College. Dori's interest in community-based education led to teaching ESL and ABE at community colleges and community-based organizations in the Seattle area. While working with Cambodian refugee communities in the U.S. to challenge the deportation of former child refugees back to Cambodia, she helped start an organization in Phnom Penh to support the returnees there. She has lived and worked in Cambodia, and continues to travel there as an advisor and mentor at the Royal University of Phnom Penh. Currently the owner of her own communications business, Dori has written extensively about immigrant and refugee issues, has developed exhibits with the Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience, and is currently working on a history of Pacific Northwest immigration for the former federal Immigration Building in Seattle.

Maru Mora Villalpando is a Latina immigrant organizer and consultant for non-profits working for racial justice. Ms. Villalpando is a trainer, political analyst for local Latino media outlets, speaker, and panelist on immigrant rights. She attended two universities in Mexico and studied Computer Programming and Systems, Journalism, and Business

Administration. Ms. Villalpando has conducted numerous bilingual and monolingual trainings throughout the state, ranging for basic community organizing 101, legal rights for undocumented workers, how the legislative process works, using local and national media outlets for community organizing and developing long-term organizing strategies for social change. Ms. Villalpando organized a successful campaign in Snohomish County to ensure that interpretation for immigrants in two local hospitals is provided and lead the effort to defeat anti-immigrant bills in the 2011 State Legislative Session, she also founded and coordinated a statewide coalition that for second time will work in proactive legislation for immigrant rights in the state. She recently coordinated the Latino voter registration in three countries and help lead an educational campaign for equal marriage for gay and lesbian Latino couples as well as doing outreach for the Latino community in support of Referendum 74.