

Memorandum



CITY OF DALLAS

DATE May 30, 2019

Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council:

TO Mayor Pro Tem Casey Thomas, II (Chair), Deputy Mayor Pro Tem Adam Medrano (Vice Chair), Councilmember Omar Narvaez, Councilmember Mark Clayton, Councilmember B. Adam McGough, Councilmember Carolyn King Arnold

SUBJECT **WCIA Update on FY 2018-2019 Budget Item Civil Legal Immigration Services Program with the Vera Institute of Justice**

On Monday, June 3, 2019, the Human and Social Needs Committee will consider a proposed agreement with the Vera Institute of Justice Inc. for the civil immigration legal services.

Summary

This memorandum summarizes the Office of Welcoming Communities and Immigrant Affairs proposal to authorize the execution of a Safe Network Agreement with the Vera Institute of Justice, committing the City to remit \$100,000 in funding to Vera for representation of Dallas residents before the Executive Office of Immigration Review, and to provide in-kind support including the selection of a non-profit legal services provider in Dallas recognized to practice before the Immigration Court, training and technical assistance, data collection, reporting, program monitoring, and communications assistance. Vera will remit a matching catalyst grant of \$100,000 to the selected non-profit legal service provider.

Background

The Office of Welcoming Communities and Immigrant Affairs was established in March 2017 to promote the civic, economic and cultural contributions of immigrants and refugees to the City of Dallas. Among WCIA's first priorities was to oversee an economic and demographic study of immigrants in Dallas. The "Welcoming Dallas Strategic Plan" was approved by Resolution No. 18-1520 on October 24, 2018 pursuant to the study and a survey. The survey assessed quality of life issues of immigrants and refugees in Dallas via a survey, finding a consistent and top concern to be the increased federal immigration enforcement system. An estimated 8,000 Dallas residents are unrepresented before the Dallas Immigration Courts.

The increased federal enforcement has had a sweeping impact on Dallas' immigrant and refugee community, ranging from distrust of local law enforcement to disenrollment of eligible family members from various benefit programs. Studies show that immigrants who are represented in removal proceedings are up to ten times more likely to establish a right to remain in the United States versus those who are unrepresented. Providing civil immigration legal assistance to Dallas' immigrant residents aligns with the goals of City's 2018-19 Service First budget to be an inclusive city.

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Dallas derives significant benefits from the economic, social and cultural contributions of immigrant families. As an inclusive city, Dallas cares deeply when these families' lives are impacted and disrupted by immigration detention. By providing civil immigration legal assistance, detained immigrants will be able to have their cases adjudicated by immigration courts and return to their families and the workplace more expeditiously, minimizing the financial burdens they would otherwise experience.

On September 18, 2018, the Dallas City Council approved the FY 2018-19 WCIA budget which included funds for the creation of a fund to provide civil immigration legal services for Dallas residents. The City of Dallas civil immigration legal services fund was established to support affordable and available access to legal services to City of Dallas residents in removal proceedings, including pathways to citizenship. This contract is currently included as one of the 44 initiatives on the FY 2018-19 Budget Accountability Report.

WCIA proposes contracting with the Vera Institute for Justice, Inc. to participate in the Safety and Fairness for Everyone (SAFE) Network, administer the City's civil immigration legal services program, and receive a 1:1 match in funding for the program. Vera is a standard bearer in the civil rights and access to justice programming. Vera has long served as a contract provider to the U.S. Department of Justice, Executive Office for Immigration Review to enable its legal access programming and provides technical and matching grants to municipalities throughout the U.S. to participate in the SAFE Network. Vera is unique in that it has established and manages the SAFE Network, which includes consultation services that supports access to justice programs initiated by municipal governments.

Vera is the only organization to offer to match funding to the City's funds and will provide technical assistance and training to establish the Dallas program providing immigration legal services to Dallas residents for sustainability. Through this program, Dallas residents who are detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement will be provided access to legal representation before the Dallas Immigration Courts.

The provision of these services is for the public purpose of increasing the public health, safety, and welfare of all persons in the municipality. This program is aligned with strategic priorities identified by City Council, including (1) Human and Social Needs as a Strategic Priority, (2) the City's "Dallas Resilience" report, and (3) Mayor Rawlings Poverty Task Force Report. No other organization can provide such services.

Fiscal Impact

Cost consideration: \$100,000. Approved in the FY 2018-19 budget.

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Human and Social Needs Committee forward the following to City Council for consideration and approval: establish the execution of a Safe Network Agreement with the Vera Institute of Justice, committing the City to remit \$100,000 in funding to Vera for representation of Dallas residents before the Executive Office of Immigration Review, and to provide in-kind support including the selection of a non-profit

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legal services provider in Dallas recognized to practice before the Immigration Court, training and technical assistance, data collection, reporting, program monitoring, and communications assistance. Vera will remit a matching catalyst grant of \$100,000 to the selected non-profit legal service provider.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.



M. Elizabeth Cedillo-Pereira, Esq.
Office of Welcoming Communities and Immigrant Affairs Director

c: T.C. Broadnax, City Manager
Mark Swann, City Auditor
Chris Caso, City Attorney (Interim)
Biliera Johnson, City Secretary
Preston Robinson, Administrative Judge
Kimberly Bizer Tolbert, Chief of Staff to the City Manager
Majed A. Al-Ghafry, Assistant City Manager

Jon Fortune, Assistant City Manager
Nadia Chandler-Hardy, Assistant City Manager and Chief Resilience Officer
Joey Zapata, Assistant City Manager
Michael Mendoza, Chief of Economic Development and Neighborhood Services
M. Elizabeth Reich, Chief Financial Officer
Laila Aleqresh, Chief Innovation Officer
Directors and Assistant Directors