



Legislation Text

File #: Res 31832, Version: 1

CITY OF SEATTLE

RESOLUTION _____

A RESOLUTION denouncing the enormous backlog of citizenship applications before U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services that is currently preventing over 18,000 immigrants in Seattle from becoming U.S. citizens and voters; and affirming The City of Seattle's recognition of immigrants as New Americans who: are an integral part of Seattle's communities; supports them as they integrate into Seattle and the nation; upholds their right and opportunity to receive fair and equal treatment in their journey to obtain legal status, including citizenship, under the U.S. Constitution, statutes, and regulations.

WHEREAS, The City of Seattle values being a welcoming city of community, opportunity, and equity for all residents, workers, and visitors; and

WHEREAS, The City of Seattle acknowledges the familial, community, and economic contributions that immigrants, including lawful permanent residents (LPRs), make to the City and the nation; and

WHEREAS, The City of Seattle recognizes the strength, diversity, and richness that immigrants, including LPRS, contribute to the City and the nation; and

WHEREAS, The City of Seattle created the New Citizen Program within the Seattle Human Services Department (HSD), a consortium of community-based organizations funded by a combination of state Department of Social and Human Services (DSHS) funding, Seattle Housing Authority (SHA) funding, and City general fund money to help lawful permanent residents become U.S. citizens through class-based trainings and one-on-one assistance; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) agency U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) itself lists several benefits of immigrants naturalizing, including, but not limited to, the right to vote in federal elections, higher priorities for petitioning family members permanently into the United States, obtaining citizenship for children born abroad, and becoming an elected official; and

WHEREAS, numerous research-based publications exist that indicate the economic and civic benefits immigrants have on the culture and economy of the United States, including the nonpartisan New American Economy's data showing that immigrants in the Seattle Metropolitan Area have \$16.9 billion in spending power in 2014 and paid \$10.3 billion in taxes, a figure that would be larger with increased rates of naturalization. Local immigrants are 17.2 percent more likely to hold a graduate degree than residents born in the United States and are 28 percent more likely to be entrepreneurs than residents born in the United States; and

WHEREAS, multiple studies show naturalization to have significant positive economic impact for both individual immigrants and their local community and economy. Naturalization can be a catalyst for a sense of permanence and long-term belonging to one's community, and this is reflected through increased rates of home ownership, household incomes, greater access to jobs, and employment rates grow when eligible immigrants become U.S. Citizens; and

WHEREAS, The City of Seattle adopted Ordinance 121063 in 2003 put into place a "don't ask" policy regarding immigration status to protect immigrants' access to police protection and City services; and

WHEREAS, Ordinance 121063 was reaffirmed by Resolution 30672 in 2004; and

WHEREAS, The City of Seattle adopted Resolution 30851 in 2006, Resolution 31193 in 2010, and Resolution 31490 in 2013 supporting Federal Comprehensive Immigration Reform and fostering family unity with a pathway to citizenship for the undocumented; and

WHEREAS, The City of Seattle enacted Ordinance 123822 in 2012 to create an Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (OIRA) and to rename the Immigrant and Refugee Advisory Board that was established in 2007 to the Seattle Immigrant and Refugee Commission; and

WHEREAS, to bolster its naturalization efforts, The City of Seattle created the New Citizen Campaign in 2016, which moved the New Citizen Program from HSD to OIRA under the New Citizen Campaign and presently convenes regularly scheduled large- and small-scale naturalization events (citizenship

workshops and clinics), facilitates partnerships with credit unions for citizenship loans, established a citizenship web portal, and created new partnerships with local non-governmental organization immigrant advocacy and service networks, financial institutions, business, philanthropy, labor, and ethnic media outlets; and

WHEREAS, The City of Seattle adopted Resolution 31730 in 2017 affirming itself as a Welcoming City that promotes programs and policies that include all, regardless of immigration or refugee status; and

WHEREAS, The City of Seattle adopted Resolution 31779 in 2017 supporting the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and denouncing harmful federal policies and hateful rhetoric against immigrant communities; and

WHEREAS, The City of Seattle is a participant in the Naturalize NOW campaign, Cities for Citizenship coalition, Cities for Action coalition, and New Americans Campaign; partners with multiple community-based organizations and holds workshops and other events to encourage eligible lawful permanent residents to apply for citizenship; and, through these valuable collaborations and services, has to date, served over 19,500 people, resulting in more than 10,000 immigrants on the path of becoming new U.S. citizens; and

WHEREAS, the current backlog of citizenship applications before U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), according to the newest data from the agency, prevents 18,707 immigrants in Seattle from becoming citizens, voters, and more active and prosperous participants in local and national democracy, as part of 753,352 applicants who are waiting nationwide to obtain citizenship, in accordance with the federal Constitution, statutes, and regulations; and

WHEREAS, the 18,707 immigrants in Seattle who are part of the backlog at the end of the second quarter of fiscal year 2018 (ending on March 31) represent a 49.03 percent increase in the backlog before the USCIS field office in Seattle, compared to a year prior; and

WHEREAS, the national backlog of citizenship applications in Seattle constitute the majority of the 20,028

pending applications in the State of Washington, as of March 31, 2018, making it the state with the ninth -largest backlog of citizenship applications; and

WHEREAS, the backlog of citizenship applications creates an effective second wall, similar in intent to the proposed federal border wall along the southern border of the United States; and

WHEREAS, this backlog of citizenship applications comes as part of a larger, harmful series of changes within USCIS, including the agency: changing USCIS' mission statement to remove the phrase "nation of immigrants" and removing its commitment to promoting "an awareness and understanding of citizenship;" taking the unprecedented step of committing limited USCIS resources towards stripping naturalized citizens of their citizenship; broadly expanding the circumstances where USCIS commences removal proceedings; implementing guidance to deny asylum for survivors of domestic and gang violence; and implementing guidance that an asylum seeker entering the United States outside a port of entry is grounds to deny the chance to describe credible fear of returning home to a judge; and

WHEREAS, the above changes are making USCIS a critical component of the Trump administration's anti-immigrant agenda, including: increasing enforcement and arrests; stripping immigrants of their legal status, including DACA and Temporary Protected Status recipients; reducing legal pathways to immigration; and separating families; and

WHEREAS, the substantially increased wait times for the naturalization process causes tangible harm to the applicants and to the democratic process, such as: individuals who applied at the end of 2017 and the beginning of 2018 will not have the ability to exercise their right to vote in local and national elections in November 2018; other applicants may potentially lose safety net benefits such as Supplemental Security Income; some individuals may experience lengthy delays in reuniting with family, especially elderly members of the family who live in other countries and who may need assistance; some applicants may miss job opportunities only available to U.S. citizens; and increased stress from both a continued risk of deportation as an LPR, uncertainty about a process that previously took four months,

and longer processing times resulting in increased needs for additional evidence because documents submitted for the naturalization application process become out-of-date; and

WHEREAS, Mayor Jenny Durkan joined with mayors and executives of municipalities across the United States in signing onto a letter addressed to the Honorable Lee Francis Cessna, the director of USCIS, urging him to take aggressive steps to reduce the waiting time for processing citizenship applications down to six months, consistent with previous practice, respectfully requesting a comprehensive and detailed plan describing how USCIS will achieve these objectives along with a commitment from local USCIS District Directors to share this plan publicly, and respectfully requesting a listing and description of previous measures taken by the agency that had the goal of reducing the backlog and an analysis of why they did not achieve their intended purpose; NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SEATTLE, THE MAYOR

CONCURRING, THAT:

Section 1. The City of Seattle will celebrate and honor its immigrant members and their numerous contributions to Seattle and the nation by affirming its commitment to be a welcoming city, regardless of immigration or refugee status, and condemning the “second wall” of citizenship application backlogs before U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

Section 2. The City of Seattle demands that USCIS urgently take specific, measurable and actionable steps to reduce the backlog and the waiting time for processing applications down to no longer than six months, consistent with past practice.

Section 3. The City of Seattle affirms its commitment to work with community-based organizations to educate the immigrant community about their ability to obtain citizenship and expand legal services to help more individuals naturalize.

Adopted by the City Council the _____ day of _____, 2018, and signed by
me in open session in authentication of its adoption this _____ day of _____, 2018.

President _____ of the City Council

The Mayor concurred the _____ day of _____, 2018.

Jenny A. Durkan, Mayor

Filed by me this _____ day of _____, 2018.

Monica Martinez Simmons, City Clerk

(Seal)