



A San Francisco

FOR ALL

SAN FRANCISCO
IMMIGRANT RIGHTS COMMISSION

REPORT 2024



The image features a high-angle, blue-tinted photograph of the San Francisco City Hall dome. The dome is the central focus, showing its intricate architectural details and the ornate spire on top. The background consists of a dense urban skyline with various skyscrapers under a clear sky. Overlaid on the image are several concentric, teal-colored wave patterns that emanate from the left side and curve across the scene. A solid yellow horizontal bar is positioned at the top of the image, and another is at the bottom.

SAN FRANCISCO IMMIGRANT RIGHTS COMMISSION

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**San Francisco residents
is an immigrant.**

With **33.9%** 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 2018-2022 American Community Survey from the 2024 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).



CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO
IMMIGRANT RIGHTS COMMISSION

OCEIA SAN FRANCISCO OFFICE OF
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT
& IMMIGRANT AFFAIRS

SAN FRANCISCO IMMIGRANT RIGHTS COMMISSION



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 and 2015, 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.

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

In support of diversity, equity, and inclusion, 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 lead-up to the 2024 presidential election, U.S. immigration policy remains a key issue for lawmakers on both sides of the aisle. The increase in asylum seekers and other migrants arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border has highlighted questions about what kind of nation the United States aspires to be. Meanwhile, many immigrants who have lived here for decades 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.

In 2023, the Biden administration lifted the pandemic-era expulsion policy Title 42, and instituted measures that sought to expand certain legal pathways for immigrants, while restricting who could apply for asylum and increasing enforcement for those who did not apply through those pathways. With immigration reform stalled in Congress, states have pursued their own immigration agendas and Texas has continued to bus migrants to certain Democratic-led cities.

This report covers the work of the IRC in 2023, 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. With over 500 anti-LGBTQIA+ bills proposed across the country, LGBTQIA+ immigrants faced additional challenges. Local service providers reported an increase 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, explore ways the City could support LGBTQIA+ immigrants, and 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.



Entrepreneur Leader:
Navarro's Martial Arts Academy



Grassroots Leader:
Samoan Community
Development Center



Grassroots Leader:
CALMA



Youth Leader:
Naz Khorram



**Vera Haile Champion of
Justice:** Okan Sengun,
LGBT Asylum Project



Special Recognition:
Katharine Gin,
Immigrants Rising



Special Recognition:
Amanda
Phingbodhipakkiya

Honorees from the 2023 Immigrant Leadership Awards

ADVANCING LANGUAGE ACCESS RIGHTS

Met with representatives of Supervisor Walton's Office to discuss proposed amendments to San Francisco's Language Access Ordinance (LAO). The proposed 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.

OPENING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMMIGRANT WORKERS

Held a special hearing on workforce development for immigrants, developed recommendations on what the City can do to open economic opportunities for all workers, regardless of immigration status, and issued a statement in support of H1B immigrant workers affected by tech layoffs who may be at risk of losing their visas.

ADVOCATING TO KEEP IMMIGRATION PATHWAYS ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE

Submitted a public comment on behalf of the City and County of San Francisco urging the federal administration to reconsider proposed fee increases to certain immigration applications, which would make them out of reach for many low-income families.

DEFENDING THE RIGHT TO ASYLUM

Submitted a public comment opposing the federal administration's proposed rule restricting asylum, calling on the United States to uphold the right to asylum, and advocating for resources to increase capacity for prompt, fair and humane asylum processing and adjudication.

HIGHLIGHTING THE NEEDS OF LGBTQIA+ IMMIGRANTS

Held a special hearing highlighting the needs of LGBTQIA+ immigrants, co-sponsored by Sen. Scott Wiener, Supervisor Rafael Mandelman, and Supervisor Joel Engardio, developed recommendations on what steps the City can take to support LGBTQIA+ immigrant community members, and participated in the proclamation of Transgender Immigrant Day.



The IRC held a special hearing on LGBTQIA+ immigrants at the San Francisco LGBT Center.

SUPPORTING THE RIGHTS OF DOMESTIC WORKERS

Issued a resolution in support of California Senate Bill 686 (Durazo) to ensure access to safe workplaces for domestic workers.

CALLING FOR HUMANE IMMIGRATION REFORM

Issued a resolution in support of the federal Renewing Immigration Provisions of the Immigration Act of 1929 (H.R. 1511 and S. 2606), also known as the Registry Bill, and urging action on humane immigration reform.



Amit Patel (left) and Bongo Sidibe (right) perform at the 2023 Immigrant Leadership Awards at City Hall.



Commissioners take their oath of office at San Francisco City Hall.

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 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.
- Preserve affordable, quality City and community-based services for all San Franciscans.
- 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.

- Strengthen language access rights and services as a pathway to meaningful engagement and full participation of immigrants; invest in language services and necessary staff to improve language access capacity; encourage City departments to continually work to improve language access by partnering with OCEIA to ensure comprehensive language access protocols; and update the Language Access Ordinance to develop policies that address the language needs of community members.
- 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.
- 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 sf.gov/immigrantrights for more information.

COMMISSIONERS & STAFF

Commissioners:

Celine Kennelly, Chair
Kudrat D. Chaudhary,
Vice Chair

Soha Abdou
Elahe Enssani
Haregu Gaime
Lucia Obregon Matzer
Mario Paz
Victor Qiu
Franklin M. Ricarte
Jessy Ruiz
Marco Senghor
Sarah Souza
Alicia Wang

Former Commissioners:*

*Nima Rahimi
Zay David Latt*

Executive Committee: Chair Kennelly, Vice Chair Chaudhary, Members Paz, Ricarte, 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 2023-2024