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# A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO IMMIGRANT SERVICES.

**BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:**

1           SECTION 1. The legislature finds that Hawaii has a long  
2 history of welcoming immigrants. Immigrants and their children  
3 have made, and continue to make, significant contributions to  
4 the State, including the State's economy, workforce, and  
5 community.

6           The legislature further finds that immigrants comprise two  
7 hundred and seventy thousand members, or eighteen per cent, of  
8 Hawaii's population, including one hundred forty-five thousand  
9 persons who are naturalized citizens. Immigrants come to Hawaii  
10 from many countries and almost half of all immigrants in the  
11 State come from the Philippines. Immigrants make up forty per  
12 cent of agricultural workers, thirty-three per cent of tourism  
13 and hospitality workers, and twenty-three per cent of health  
14 care workers in the State. Despite these numbers, new  
15 immigrants face significant barriers to success, including  
16 discrimination, cultural misunderstandings, and language  
17 barriers. These barriers may prevent them from accessing



1 government services and participating fully in their  
2 communities.

3       The legislature notes that in 1985, the office of community  
4 services was established as an attached agency to the department  
5 of labor and industrial relations. The legislative mandate of  
6 the office of community services is to serve low-income  
7 individuals, immigrants, and refugees. In establishing the  
8 office, the legislature consolidated four anti-poverty agencies  
9 that administered state and federal funds, including the office  
10 of the progressive neighborhoods program, Hawaii office of  
11 economic opportunity, refugee resettlement program, and state  
12 immigrant services center. Before its consolidation and  
13 establishment as an agency attached to the department of labor  
14 and industrial relations, the state immigrant services center  
15 was attached to the governor's office and received significant  
16 funding and staffing.

17       The legislature believes that the director and staff of the  
18 office of community services have demonstrated the office's  
19 ability to serve low-income individuals and families by  
20 successfully administering millions of dollars in federal funds  
21 and state grants-in-aid. However, while immigrants and refugees



1 can also benefit from these services, the programs offered do  
2 not address the needs of immigrants and refugees who have  
3 limited English proficiency or are unfamiliar with government  
4 regulations and benefits. The legislature considered this issue  
5 in House Concurrent Resolution No. 169, Regular Session of 2021,  
6 and convened a working group to "improve access to government  
7 services for immigrants and increase immigrant opportunities to  
8 make civic and economic contributions to the community". As  
9 part of the working group, community groups identified the  
10 office of community services as the best state agency to serve  
11 immigrants and suggested that the office be given dedicated  
12 staff to address immigrant and refugee matters. In response,  
13 Act 256, Session Laws of Hawaii 2022, provided \$1,000,000 to  
14 reinstate immigrant resource centers and to support nonprofit  
15 immigrant service agencies.

16 The legislature recognizes that other states provide  
17 immigrant and refugee services through a statewide, state-funded  
18 office for immigrant affairs. This type of office exists in  
19 Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, and New York, and has recently  
20 been proposed in California. Many cities across the nation,  
21 including Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle, have also



1 established comprehensive, government-funded offices for  
2 immigrant and refugee affairs. In Hawaii, the counties of Maui  
3 and Hawaii have offices for immigrant affairs, but there are  
4 none in the county of Kauai or the city and county of Honolulu.

5 The legislature believes that it is the State's  
6 responsibility to provide needed support programs for Hawaii's  
7 immigrants, refugees, and others, and to ensure they have equal  
8 access to government programs. Dedicated staff and additional  
9 resources are needed to allow the office of community services  
10 to meet its full legislative mandate.

11 Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to establish and  
12 appropriate moneys for an immigrant services and access unit  
13 within the office of community services.

14 SECTION 2. Chapter 371K, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is  
15 amended by adding a new section to be appropriately designated  
16 and to read as follows:

17 "§371K- Immigrant services and access unit. (a) There  
18 is established within the office of community services an  
19 immigrant services and access unit. The purpose of the  
20 immigrant services and access unit shall be to promote economic  
21 self-sufficiency, inclusion, and community integration for



1 immigrants by improving access to appropriate services,  
2 resources, and benefits. The immigrant services and access unit  
3 may:

4 (1) Offer services, including but not limited to:

5 (A) English language training;

6 (B) Translation and interpretation;

7 (C) Workforce development training;

8 (D) Legal services;

9 (E) Assistance in obtaining citizenship and

10 naturalization; and

11 (F) Programs to assist in learning about and

12 accessing government services;

13 (2) Coordinate with nonprofit organizations, supported by

14 grants and contracts, for the direct provision of

15 immigrant services;

16 (3) Coordinate with other immigrant-serving state agencies

17 and county immigrant services offices;

18 (4) Explore all available federal resources, including

19 federal grants;

20 (5) Establish an advisory committee with representatives

21 from immigrant communities, immigrant-serving



- 1           organizations, and appropriate state and county
- 2           agencies; and
- 3           (6) Oversee and monitor the immigrant resource center
- 4           program.
- 5           (b) Services offered by the immigrant services and access
- 6 unit may be available to:
- 7           (1) Immigrants;
- 8           (2) Refugees;
- 9           (3) Compact of Free Association with the United States
- 10           residents;
- 11           (4) Undocumented persons; and
- 12           (5) Other persons, regardless of the person's immigration
- 13           status."

14           SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general

15 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$                    or so

16 much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2023-2024 and

17 \$                    or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal

18 year 2024-2025 for an immigrant services and access unit within

19 the office of community services, including funding for:



1 (1) full-time equivalent ( FTE) positions in  
2 fiscal year 2023-2024, comprising coordinator  
3 and clerical position;

4 (2) full-time equivalent ( FTE) positions in  
5 fiscal year 2024-2025,  
6 comprising coordinator, clerical position,  
7 and specialists; and

8 (3) Operations and the provision of services.

9 The sums appropriated shall be expended by the department  
10 of labor and industrial relations for the purposes of this Act.

11 SECTION 4. New statutory material is underscored.

12 SECTION 5. This Act shall take effect on January 1, 2050.



**Report Title:**

Office of Community Services; Immigrant Services; Positions;  
Appropriation

**Description:**

Establishes and appropriates moneys for an immigrant services  
and access unit within the Office of Community Services.  
Effective 1/1/2050. (SD1)

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