
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 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; almost half of all immigrants in the State
11 come from the Philippines. Immigrants make up forty per cent of
12 agricultural workers, thirty-three per cent of tourism and
13 hospitality workers, and twenty-three per cent of health care
14 workers in the State. Despite these numbers, new immigrants
15 face significant barriers to success, including discrimination,
16 cultural misunderstandings, and language barriers. These



1 barriers may prevent them from accessing government services and
2 participating fully in their 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, Seattle, and San Francisco, have also



1 established comprehensive, publicly-funded offices for immigrant
2 and refugee affairs. In Hawaii, the counties of Maui and Hawaii
3 have offices for immigrant affairs, but there are none in the
4 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 funds 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; and
- 20 (5) Establish an advisory committee with representatives
21 from immigrant communities, immigrant-serving



1 organizations, and appropriate state and county
2 agencies.

3 (b) Services offered by the immigrant services and access
4 unit shall be available to:

5 (1) Immigrants;

6 (2) Refugees;

7 (3) Compact of Free Association with the United States
8 residents;

9 (4) Undocumented persons; and

10 (5) Other persons, regardless of the person's immigration
11 status."

12 SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general
13 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$ or so
14 much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2023-2024 and
15 \$ or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal
16 year 2024-2025 for an immigrant services and access unit within
17 the office of community services, including funding for:

18 (1) Two full-time equivalent (2.0 FTE) coordinator and
19 clerical positions in fiscal year 2023-2024;



1 (2) Five full-time equivalent (5.0 FTE) positions in
2 fiscal year 2024-2025, comprising one coordinator, one
3 clerical position, and three specialists; and

4 (3) Operations and the provision of services.

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

7 SECTION 4. New statutory material is underscored.

8 SECTION 5. This Act shall take effect on June 30, 3000.



H.B. NO. 439
H.D. 1

Report Title:

OCS; Immigrant Services and Access Unit; Appropriation

Description:

Establishes and appropriates funds for an immigrant services and access unit within the office of community services. Effective 6/30/3000. (HD1)

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