

Memorandum



CITY OF DALLAS

DATE February 5, 2021

TO Honorable Members of the Workforce, Education, and Equity Committee

SUBJECT **Upcoming Office of Equity and Inclusion Agenda Item to Authorize the Execution of a Safe Network Agreement with the Vera Institute of Justice, Inc.**

On Wednesday February 10, 2021, the Office of Equity and Inclusion – Welcoming Communities and Immigrant Affairs Division (WCIA) will be presenting the following agenda item for City Council approval:

21-70: Authorize the execution of a Safe Network Agreement with the Vera Institute of Justice, Inc. to **(1)** administer the civil immigration legal services initiative and **(2)** provide in-kind infrastructure support including training and technical assistance, data collection, reporting, program monitoring, and communications assistance, in an amount not to exceed \$100,000.00, for the period September 16, 2020 through September 15, 2022 - Not to exceed \$100,000.00 - Financing: General Fund

Recommendation

WCIA is seeking approval from the Workforce, Education, and Equity Committee to contract with the Vera Institute for Justice, Inc. (The Vera Institute) to continue its participation in the [Safety and Fairness for Everyone \(SAFE\) Network](#) and administer the City of Dallas' civil immigration legal services program.

The Vera Institute is a nonprofit organization with the mission to drive change to urgently build and improve justice systems that ensure fairness, promote safety, and strengthen communities. The Vera Institute is a standard-bearer in the civil rights and access to justice programming. The Vera Institute 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 assistance to municipalities throughout the U.S. to participate in the Network.

The Vera Institute 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. Because of the extremely technical nature of this type of legal work, it is necessary to have the Vera Institute guide the City of Dallas through this program, avoiding unnecessary risk or liability.

Background

Welcoming Dallas Strategic Plan

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.

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U.S. Immigration Enforcement in Dallas

After reaching its peak in FY 2018, the Dallas enforcement area of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has become the national leader in ICE apprehensions. Many of these apprehensions lead to individuals being placed in removal proceedings in Dallas. [Approximately 14,630 Dallas residents were apprehended by ICE in FY 2020](#), many who were unrepresented before the Dallas Immigration Courts.

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.

Since March of 2020, WCIA has partnered with the Vera Institute for the provision of civil immigration legal services, among other services. Through this program, Dallas residents who are pro se and lack sufficient monetary resources are provided access to legal representation before the Dallas Immigration Courts. The Vera Institute has provided program performance, data collection and evaluation throughout the process.

As the administrator of the Safety and Fairness for Everyone network, the Vera Institute has also connected the City of Dallas with best practices and information from other sites participating across the US. Thanks to this partnership, the City of Dallas has been meeting its target service goals, despite the setbacks of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Vera Institute is administering the SAFE Dallas program through its partnership with local nonprofit and legal service provider, International Rescue Committee Dallas (IRC). Through this collaboration immigrant families who are in deportation proceedings receive legal assistance as well as wrap around services for their families. In addition to securing an attorney for Dallas residents in ICE hold, families are assigned with a bilingual social worker staffed by IRC to provide case management services.

Families have been referred to resources such as the RAICES Bond Program, COVID-19 Emergency Financial Assistance, Emma Lazarus Resilience Fund, the Office of Community Care's Short-Term Rental Assistance Program, and International Rescue Committee's Mental Health Program.

This program was initiated during COVID-19, requiring the IRC to adapt to the ways in which it has impacted Dallas residents. The Vera Institute and International Rescue Committee found creative ways to identify and represent eligible clients including expanding their referral system and filing petitions for humanitarian release.

Budget

The Dallas City Council approved the FY 2021-2022 WCIA budget to include 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. These services are currently included as one of the 44 initiatives on the FY 2020-2021 Budget Accountability Report.

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Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact me or Christina da Silva, Welcoming Communities and Immigrant Affairs Officer, Office of Equity and Inclusion, at christina.dasilva@dallascityhall.com.



Liz Cedillo-Pereira
Chief of Equity and Inclusion

[Appendix]

c:	Honorably Mayor and City Council Members	Majed A. Al-Ghafry, Assistant City Manager
	T.C. Broadnax, City Manager	Jon Fortune, Assistant City Manager
	Chris Caso, City Attorney	Joey Zapata, Assistant City Manager
	Mark Swann, City Auditor	Dr. Eric A. Johnson, Chief of Economic Development and Neighborhood Services
	Biliera Johnson, City Secretary	M. Elizabeth Reich, Chief Financial Officer
	Preston Robinson, Administrative Judge	Directors and Assistant Directors
	Kimberly Bizzor Tolbert, Chief of Staff to the City Manager	

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Appendix

Welcoming Dallas Strategic Plan:

<https://dallascityhall.com/departments/wcia/DCH%20Documents/COD-WCIA-Booklet.pdf>

Immigration and Customs Enforcement Local Statistics FY 2020:

<https://www.ice.gov/doclib/news/library/reports/annual-report/ero-fy20-localstatistics.pdf>

Vera Institute for Justice SAFE Network Website:

<https://www.vera.org/initiatives/safe-initiative/why-safe>

Profile of the immigrant population at risk for deportation in Dallas, Texas:

<https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/profile-of-foreign-born-population-dallas.pdf>

SAFE Network Fact Sheet 2019:

<https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/due-process-for-all-year-2-safe-network.pdf>

American Immigration Council – Impact of COVID-19 on Noncitizens

<https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/impact-covid-19-us-immigration-system>