



**TO:** Elizabeth Pauli, City Manager  
**FROM:** Diane Powers, Office of Equity and Human Rights  
**COPY:** Committee on Vitality and Safety; Elizabeth Pauli, City Manager; Tadd Wille, Assistant City Manager; Mark Lauzier, Assistant City Manager; Bill Fosbre, Acting City Attorney; Executive Leadership Team; File  
**SUBJECT:** Commission on Immigrant and Refugee Affairs  
**DATE:** October 12, 2017

**SUMMARY:**

In January 2017, City Council created a task force to focus on the needs of immigrants and refugees in Tacoma. This task force is made up of residents and community partners committed to finding ways to best support immigrants and refugees in Tacoma. Since its formation, the Immigrant and Refugee Task Force has been working diligently at supporting their communities by making recommendations to Council and City staff. One such recommendation presented is the creation of a Commission for Immigrant and Refugee Affairs. At the Community, Vitality, and Safety Committee meeting on October 12, the Office of Equity and Human Rights will present several options for the Committee to consider.

**BACKGROUND:**

The City of Tacoma population consists of 13 percent non-citizen residents. Due to recent federal executive orders creating fear and unease among immigrants and refugees across the country, Tacoma recognized the unique barriers and concerns of this community. In January 2017, the City Council passed a Resolution to create an Immigrant and Refugee Task Force to gain a better understanding of issues faced by immigrants and refugees. The Task Force convened community partners and conducted surveys to obtain diverse perspectives on how Tacoma can become a more inclusive and welcoming city. The Task Force developed a set of recommendations and conveyed them to the City Manager and City Council with assistance from the Office of Equity and Human Rights.

One of the proposed action steps shared by the Immigrant and Refugee Task Force was to establish a new Commission on Immigrant and Refugee Affairs.

Currently, The Office of Equity and Human Rights (OEHR) staffs two commissions: the Commission on Disabilities and the Human Rights Commission.

The duties and powers of the Human Rights Commission include the following:

- *1.29.010 Findings*
  - ...unlawful discrimination on the basis of race, religion, color, **national origin or ancestry**...
  - ... empowers a commission to study and investigate problems of prejudice bigotry, and discrimination and to encourage and coordinate the implementation of programs consistent with the needs and rights of all **residents of the City of Tacoma**.”
- *1.29.020 Creation of a Human Rights Commission*
  - Consult with and maintain contact with the other public agencies, civil rights organizations, representative of the employers, labor unions... **national origin groups**, community organizations concerned with interracial, interreligious and **intercultural understanding**....



- In prescribing the above duties and functions of the Commission, it is not the intent of the City Council to **duplicate or overlap the functions, duties, or responsibilities** heretofore or hereafter assigned to any department, board, or committee of the City or the responsibilities of the City Manager.
- *1.290.030 Commission Responsibilities of the Office of Equity and Human Rights*
  - Receive and conduct impartial investigations of complaints that have been filed by individuals who believe they have been discriminated against due to their race, religion, color, **national origin or ancestry**...

**ISSUE:**

Creation of a new commission requires deliberate determination of the scope of duties, authorization of the new commission and reconciliation with the existing authority of the Human Rights Commission. An alternative to creating a new commission, the Council could appoint one or more seats on the Human Rights Commission (HRC) specifically for individuals from the immigrant and refugee community. These seats could help insure that the HRC works includes the issues and voices from the immigrant and refugee community. The Human Rights Commission protects individuals who are treated unfavorably in a place of employment, public accommodations, or housing because they are from a particular country or part of the world outside the U.S. This includes ethnicity, accent, or the appearance of a certain ethnic background. The Human Rights Commission could become the cornerstone of the immigrant and refugee community. Most importantly, Tacoma's Human Rights Division enforces Tacoma Municipal Code 1.29 which gives authority of jurisdiction within the City. In addition, HRC could establish a standing subcommittee specifically on immigrant and refugee affairs.

**ALTERNATIVES:**

In addition to incorporating the Task Force into the Human Rights Commission, the Office of Equity and Human Rights has examined two alternatives that could meet the needs of the Tacoma immigrant and refugee community.

The alternatives are as follows:

1. The Immigrant and Refugee Task Force could continue serving the public, as is, to bring forth recommendations to the City and the Human Rights Commission. In Resolution No. 39116, the City became a member of the Welcoming Cities and Counties Initiative. Then, in January passed Resolution No. 36942 which established a convening of immigrants and refugee community partners and advocates. This convening created a Task Force without an end date. Through the Task Force, the voice of the community furthered the City's vision as an inclusive and equitable city. The Task Force can continue providing an opportunity for concerned parties to work with the City to ensure all residents feel valued, secure, and supported.
2. Establish a new Commission on Immigrant and Refugee Affairs. This new commission's charge will be very similar to the Task Force's charge and vision. When the City Council creates, establishes and recognize the Commission by ordinance, it will give the Commission authority within the Tacoma Municipal Code.



**FISCAL IMPACT:**

The Immigrant and Refugee Affairs Commission will cost approximately \$60,000 to support. The cost includes 0.2 FTE administrative assistant (\$16,000), 0.25 for a Management Analyst II (\$25,000), and translation/interpretation services (\$20,000). The staff assignments will include administrative duties and liaison and policy support of this new body. Also, due to diversity of the languages spoken by these individuals, translation and interpretation services are required for adequate communication and dialogue.

The staff time could be supported by new funding or redirection of existing staff resources.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

The Office of Equity and Human Rights recommends the Community, Vitality, and Safety Committee review the options and choose the appropriate option for the population.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Human Rights Commission Relationship to the Immigrant and Refugee Task Force