

PPL POSITION PAPER: IMMIGRATION REFORM

Project for Pride in Living (PPL) is a non-profit organization with a 34-year history of assisting lower income families in the Twin Cities toward greater self-sufficiency through an integrated approach that incorporates affordable housing, employment, job training, and human services. Over the years we have seen that the changing face of the Twin Cities reflects a profound and growing prevalence of disparities based on socioeconomic status. An increased percentage of the population we serve consists of recent immigrants who face special barriers to self-sufficiency. This population fits categories based on race, class, and place that identify groups facing severe inequities in housing, education, and employment.

Immigrants and refugees from many areas of the world, including Africa, Southeast Asia and Spanish-speaking countries in North, Central and South America, have flocked to the Twin Cities. Organizations like PPL, which provide employment assistance as well as other services, are challenged to meet the specific needs presented by these communities. While some individuals are challenged by language barriers, others are limited in the kinds of employment or housing that are consistent with their beliefs and cultural norms. **Many of these unique challenges to creating a new life are compounded by an increasingly complicated and expensive immigration processes.**

We have heard story after story of the difficulties our participants and their families face while trying to obtain residency or citizenship. According to these immigrants, the process discriminates against low-income applicants because of unreasonably high fees that pose an enormous financial burden. In addition, the current system is too difficult for the average applicant to navigate with limited English language skills and virtually no experience with our customs and institutions. While more affluent applicants may be able to pay for legal assistance, many of those we serve are unable to afford such help. The manner in which the system is set up leaves large cracks through which many new residents slip, causing confusion or delayed progress.

Eligibility for government assistance is currently dependent upon status as a resident or citizen. This precludes application by a large percentage of immigrants, especially those from East Africa and Southeast Asia. Specifically, asylees and non-refugee immigrants (also known as sponsored immigrants) are unable to participate in many programs such as Child Care Assistance, Minnesota Care, MFIP, or Section 8 Housing. This practice means already vulnerable immigrants must confront even more difficulty and barriers to creating a stable life for themselves and their families.

Currently, regulations and requirements make the reunification of immigrant families extremely difficult. Husbands and wives, parents and children are often separated by thousands of miles because of confusing and arbitrary guidelines that prohibit or prolong sponsorship. This weakens family bonds and makes more emotionally difficult the entire process of immigration and transition.

For these reasons PPL is committed to advocating for comprehensive immigration reform that simplifies and streamlines the process that results in decreased fees, encourages family reunification, and expands eligibility to include the aforementioned population sectors.

Contact the Public Policy Team for more information: publicpolicy@ppl-inc.org