SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

REQUESTING THE DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS TO CONVENE A WORKING GROUP TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT SERVICES FOR IMMIGRANTS AND INCREASE IMMIGRANT OPPORTUNITIES TO MAKE CIVIC AND ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE COMMUNITY.

WHEREAS, immigrants have been an important part of the history of the State; are an integral part of Hawaii's diverse, multicultural community; and make extensive contributions as our neighbors, co-workers, employers, community leaders, and taxpayers; and

WHEREAS, despite their value to our community, immigrants continue to face many barriers, including difficulty accessing government services and appropriately responding to government requirements to qualify for various services; and

WHEREAS, in 2018, eighteen percent of the State's population, or 256,000 persons, were immigrants or foreign-born residents, and more than 145,000 persons were naturalized United States citizens; and

WHEREAS, many immigrants live in households having United States citizens such as Hawaii-born children and American-born spouses, and the top six countries of birth for immigrants to Hawaii are the Philippines (sixty percent), Japan (eight percent), China (eight percent), Korea (seven percent), Micronesia (five percent), and Vietnam (three percent); further, about one-third of limited English-speaking persons are native speakers of the Filipino dialects Ilokano and Tagalog; and

WHEREAS, immigrants are well-represented in the State's workforce, in sectors such as agriculture (forty percent), tourism and hospitality (thirty-three percent), and health care
(twenty-three percent), and collectively contribute more than
$668 million in state and local taxes; and

WHEREAS, foreign-born residents, particularly recent
arrivals, often encounter discrimination and cultural
misunderstanding and face other barriers to full inclusion and
participation in society, partly due to limited knowledge of
their rights and responsibilities and limited English-language
ability, which in turn limits their access to government and
other community-based resources; and

WHEREAS, in 1985, four anti-poverty agencies administering
state and federal funds -- the Progressive Neighborhoods
Program, Hawaii Office of Economic Opportunity, Refugee
Resettlement Program, and State Immigrant Services Center --
were consolidated by the Legislature, which established in its
place the Office of Community Services, an attached agency to
the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations; and

WHEREAS, as an office whose legislatively-mandated mission
is to help low-income individuals and families, refugees, and
immigrants to live healthier lives, achieve greater economic
self-sufficiency, and increase their contributions to the State,
the Office of Community Services is responsible for numerous
statewide programs and provides millions of federal and state
dollars to low-income communities for food, health services,
employment services, and the like; and

WHEREAS, the Office of Community Services' focus on, and
funding for, services to immigrant and refugee communities has
been seriously eroded, with nearly one hundred percent of
staffing and funds currently being used for low-income
communities but none for immigrant-specific services; and

WHEREAS, many cities across the nation such as Seattle and
San Francisco have established comprehensive government-funded
offices for immigrant affairs, and by establishing the Office of
Community Services, the Legislature acknowledged that immigrants
and refugees need of targeted services; and

WHEREAS, the Counties of Maui and Hawaii demonstrate their
commitment by having full-time staff to assist immigrants, yet
the City and County of Honolulu's current budget has funding for
positions that promote increased immigrant access to City
services, but no positions that have been established or filled;
and

WHEREAS, President Biden and congressional leaders have
proposed significant changes in immigration policy and have also
expressed support for immigration programs, creation of a
National Office of New Americans, expanding access to
citizenship, funding workforce development and English language
learning programs, increasing access to justice and due process,
and rebuilding the capacity and infrastructure of local
communities to welcome refugees; and

WHEREAS, the State would be in a stronger position to gain
access to new federal funding if the Office of Community
Services is equipped to provide leadership and a renewed focus
on responding to immigrant needs; and

WHEREAS, the Office of Community Services is the primary
agency established by the Legislature to serve low-income
immigrant and refugee communities, but currently has little to
no focus on providing supportive services for these communities;
however, with improved planning and support, the Office of
Community Services can meet its statutory mandate to serve the
immigrant and refugee communities; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED by the Senate of the Thirty-first
Legislature of the State of Hawaii, Regular Session of 2021, the
House of Representatives concurring, that the Department of
Labor and Industrial Relations is urged to convene a working
group to improve access to government services for immigrants
and increase immigrant opportunities to make civic and economic
contributions to the community; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Director of Labor and
Industrial Relations is requested to convene the working group,
to consist of the following members or their designees:

(1) The Governor;
(2) The Director of Labor and Industrial Relations;
(3) The Executive Director of the Office of Community Services;

(4) The Executive Director of the Office of Language Access;

(5) A representative from the Hawaii Coalition for Immigrant Rights, by invitation of the Director of Labor and Industrial Relations;

(6) A representative from the Inter-Agency Council for Immigrant Services, by invitation of the Director of Labor and Industrial Relations; and

(7) A representative from any other government entity or community organization that the working group deems relevant and appropriate; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the working group is requested to select one of its members to serve as chairperson; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the working group is requested to submit a report of its findings and recommendations, including any proposed legislation, no later than twenty days prior to the convening of the Regular Session of 2022; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that certified copies of this Concurrent Resolution be transmitted to the Governor; Director of Labor and Industrial Relations; Executive Director of the Office of Community Services; Executive Director of the Office of Language Access; Executive Director of the Hawaii Coalition for Immigrant Rights; and President of the Inter-Agency Council for Immigrant Services.

OFFERED BY: [Signature]