



AMERICAN
IMMIGRATION
LAWYERS
ASSOCIATION

October 19, 2022

Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

Via Email: humanservices@dccouncil.us

**Re: Written Testimony in Opposition to
B24-0992 - Migrant Services and Supports Act of 2022**

Dear Council members:

The American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) writes to express grave concerns about the Migrant Services and Supports Act of 2022 and to ask the Council of the District of Columbia (the Council) to reconsider the bill, which would create and reinforce a system of two-tiered residency within Washington D.C. While we understand the unique situation the District faces in navigating the recent increase in migrants arriving to the District, AILA is opposed to this bill and asks the Council to not pass any legislation that would enshrine discrimination against immigrants into law. Specifically, we ask that the Council not create a separate residency requirement for migrants under the Homeless Services Reform Act and that no migrants residing in D.C. are excluded from accessing D.C. Homeless services.

Headquartered in Washington, D.C., AILA is the national association of more than 16,000 attorneys and law professors who practice and teach immigration law, hundreds of whom live or work in Washington, D.C. Many of us work daily with asylum seekers and other migrants who escaped persecution and countries. Asylum seekers and migrants deserve better from a city with a long history of being at the forefront of civil rights advocacy that has embraced its designation as a Welcoming City.

While we stand against all forms of the disparate treatment of migrants, we are particularly concerned about the sweeping language in this bill. For example, the bill excludes individuals from accessing homeless services who are: “waiting to report to an immigration officer located outside the District or waiting to participate in an immigration interview or other immigration proceeding that is scheduled to be held by an office or court, or other tribunal or fact-finder, located outside of the District.”¹ This language includes asylum seekers fleeing persecution and navigating a process that could take years, but it also includes long-term D.C. residents waiting to become citizens, minors waiting for a special protection if they experienced abuse, neglect or abandonment, and fiancés of U.S. citizens. This effectively excludes from access to services every non-citizen with a pending application that could involve an immigration interview or court proceeding.

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AILA Doc. No. 22102401. (Posted 10/24/22)

This bill discriminates against foreign nationals across the board – not just the recently arrived vulnerable asylum seekers who deserve our humanity and support. As one in seven D.C. residents are immigrants at various stages in their immigration process, this refashioning of the residency requirement created by the Migrant Services and Supports Act of 2022 could have a significant and wide-reaching impact on tax paying immigrants who pay an estimated \$481.1 million in state and local taxes annually.² This discrimination creates a dangerous precedent that could have impact well beyond access to local homeless services.

We ask the Council to shift course and not pass any bill that creates a separate residency requirement for migrants or excludes migrants residing in D.C. from accessing homeless services.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our testimony. If the Council has any follow up questions, please feel free to reach out to Amy Grenier, Policy & Practice Counsel at agrenier@aila.org or 202-670-7182.

Sincerely,

American Immigration Lawyers Association

American Immigration Lawyers Association, Washington, D.C. Chapter

¹ B24-0992 “Migrant Services and Supports Act of 2022” (D.C. 2022), <https://ims.dccouncil.gov/Legislation/B24-0992>.

² American Immigration Council, “Immigrants in the District of Columbia,” (Aug. 6, 2020), <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/immigrants-in-washington-dc>; New American Economy, “Immigrants and the economy in: District of Columbia,” (accessed Oct. 19, 2022), <https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/locations/district-of-columbia/>.