

April 6, 2020

Governor Tim Walz
Lt Governor Peggy Flanagan
Members of the Cabinet
Attorney General Keith Ellison

Dear Minnesota elected and appointed officials:

In this moment of crisis, we applaud the efforts of the State to provide useful and timely information and resources to keep Minnesotans safe. For our immigrant and refugee communities, however, access to these critical resources is limited by language and systems navigation barriers. These inequities of access force non-English speakers to resort to information offered by other states or from their countries of origin, which is not relevant to services available here in Minnesota. Additionally, confusion and misinformation circulating in our communities that puts us all in danger cannot be dispelled when the majority of the State's communications are in English only.

We need you to invest in quality translation services to ensure that every resident of Minnesota can access all of the knowledge and resources they need right now. It is not enough to point to fragments of translated information or a handful of resources already available in languages other than English. We need more support so that no Minnesotans are left behind. There are several examples of where this is already happening. The Executive Orders issued by Governor Walz have justifiably altered our daily lives, but a lack of access to them in languages other than English perpetuates confusion and uncertainty for many immigrants who worry about what they mean for themselves and their families. Many folks experiencing layoffs cannot obtain clear information on how to apply for unemployment insurance, how to work with their landlords, or even how to take care of loved ones who have tested positive for COVID-19 and must quarantine at home. It is imperative that essential workers, for instance in factories, warehouse and agricultural industries have critical Covid19 safety related protocol that is not filtered through the employer.

Providing support for immigrant and refugee communities means having staff available to respond to their questions and needs in culturally and linguistically relevant terms. We ask that the state invest in not just majority minority second languages, but include resources beyond only Spanish, Somali and Hmong. The State also has relationships it can leverage with community based organizations that are trusted by immigrant Minnesotans to

provide accurately translated information and immediate support with resource navigation. At this time, it is critical that the State is flexible when contracting with translators and interpreters in order to avoid delays. These services should be treated like other essential items like contracting for Personal Protective Equipment.

We are thankful for the strong leadership shown by Governor Walz and his Cabinet in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic head-on, and call on you all now to help keep our immigrant and refugee communities safe, better informed, and well-prepared.

Sincerely,

ACER (African Career Education and Resource, Inc)

Black Immigrant Collective

CAPI

Casa de Esperanza

Centro Tyrone Guzman

Citizens League

Children's Defense Fund

COPAL

Guadalupe Alternative Programs/Change Inc

Hispanic Solutions Group

Hmong American Census network

Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota

Isuroon (Strong Women Strong Communities)

JustUs Health

KOOTASCA Community Action

Legal Services Advocacy Project

Minnesota Budget Project

Minnesota Council of Nonprofits

MIRAC (Minnesota Immigrant Rights Action Committee)

Vietnamese Social Services of Minnesota

Voices for Racial Justice

cc/ Chris Taylor, Chief Inclusion Officer

Migdalia Loyola Melendez, Deputy Chief of Staff for Public Engagement.

Office of Governor Tim Walz and Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan