

August 15th, 2023

An open letter to the City of Bellingham, Councilmembers, Mayor, Immigration Advisory Board, and community,

It has been quite an experience serving on the Immigration Advisory Board. As a young person, joining a city advisory board was initially quite intimidating. I felt that I didn't have the language, education, or experience to be a contributing member. If it weren't for the encouragement and upliftment of Liz Darrow and others, I wouldn't have agreed to send in the application and eventually become a member of this board.

Since then, I've realized that the Immigration Advisory Board's mission and direction radically differ from the preconceptions and biases of government spaces I had previously. My entire perspective has shifted. I've realized that the reason why change is slow-moving in this community is because those who are most marginalized by systemic oppression don't have access to spaces of power or influence. Even on this board, a space where immigrants and advocating allies can express their needs, our voices are often shut down, ignored, or pushed out and silenced.

Until city leaders treat people of color, working-class people, poor people, and immigrants with genuine respect, our communities will continue to face the brunt harms of the carceral system, climate change, and racism. The City of Bellingham is in no way immune to racism and its many manifestations—in fact, racism is all around us, felt in nearly every interaction this board makes with the city. Without city action to support the leadership of impacted communities, these issues will continue to plague our people and further deepen the crevices of distrust between us.

As I reflect on my time on this board, my heart is full of gratitude for the hard work and vision of so many amazing, dedicated, and brave people who I have gotten to serve with. At the same time, my heart sinks with disappointment to see the efforts of the Mayor and his office at destabilizing this board during a time when we need our foundational leaders the most. While these disingenuous and politically charged efforts are hurtful—I have the utmost confidence in our community to rise back from these setbacks. However invisible the immigrant community is in Bellingham and Whatcom County, we are here, and we are here to stay, and we are here to fight for the resources, lives, and dignity that we deserve. This work is never easy, and I am so grateful to those who have been here long before I, showing me the resilience needed to bring community-based and led change.

I urge the City of Bellingham to show the immigrant community with actions, not words that we are welcome here. I urge the City of Bellingham to be uncomfortable, to make

mistakes, to do things differently, and to believe that another world is possible—a world where immigrants can live safe, healthy, and happy lives.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve on this board. It has been a true honor and privilege.

With gratitude,

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