



Legislation Text

File #: 2022-0153, **Version:** 2

A MOTION declaring King County's support for the Cities for Citizenship initiative and directing the executive to sign the county onto the initiative as a participating community.

WHEREAS, there are approximately 290,000 lawful permanent residents in Washington state and over 75,000 lawful permanent residents eligible to naturalize in King County, and

WHEREAS, naturalization provides benefits to lawful permanent residents by providing them with full civil and political rights, protection against deportation, easier travel abroad, and full access to government jobs and assistance, and

WHEREAS, research from the Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration found that immigrants who naturalize can see an estimated 8 percent to 11 percent increase in their earnings and suggest the increased earnings not only boost financial security for families but also generate spending and economic activity in the community, and

WHEREAS, according to reports from the Migration Policy Institute and the Pew Research Center, far fewer immigrants naturalize than are eligible to do so and barriers to naturalization include low English language proficiency and the cost and complexity of the naturalization process, and

WHEREAS, cities and counties are uniquely situated to encourage and support their immigrant constituents to apply for citizenship, and

WHEREAS, the Cities for Citizenship initiative is a national initiative aimed at increasing citizenship among eligible permanent residents in the United States and encouraging local jurisdictions across the country to invest in citizenship programs, and

WHEREAS, Cities for Citizenship is premised on the idea that when municipal leaders develop and invest in naturalization efforts, they produce substantial economic and civic benefits for all of their constituents, and

WHEREAS, the Cities for Citizenship initiative, coordinated by the National Partnership for New Americans, is a network of over 100 cities and counties, including the cities of Kirkland, Redmond, Seattle, Tacoma and Yakima as well as Kitsap County, and

WHEREAS, participation in the Cities for Citizenship initiative is free and participating communities receive access to technical support and policy advice, research and demographic data, best practices from cities and counties across the country and networking opportunities with other jurisdictions, and

WHEREAS, communities participating in the Cities for Citizenship initiative are encouraged to share information on their naturalization efforts via an annual survey, participate in monthly partner calls and attend the initiative's annual Municipal Gathering, and

WHEREAS, King County has a history of supporting immigrants and refugees, including establishing the King County immigrant and refugee commission, establishing translation assistance requirements for limited English proficient individuals, enhancing county services for immigrant and refugees, providing legal aid to residents seeking documented status and citizenship and providing direct financial assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic, and

WHEREAS, in 2021 the King County council approved \$5 million to create a first-in-the-nation program to help pay for filing fees and other costs for people applying for legal status and an additional \$11.2 million for a grant fund to assist immigrants and refugees who have otherwise not been eligible for federal coronavirus pandemic relief, and

WHEREAS King County could benefit from joining the Cities for Citizenship initiative to network with and learn from national experts and other local jurisdictions engaged in similar work;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT MOVED by the Council of King County:

A. King County supports the Cities for Citizenship initiative. The executive is directed to sign the county onto the initiative as a participating community.

B. The executive shall designate a county representative to serve as the liaison to the Cities for Citizenship initiative.

C. King County will work collaboratively with the Cities for Citizenship initiative and local community-based organizations to increase citizenship among immigrants in King County.