

Human Services and Immigration

Context

Despite its many positive attributes, New Haven is challenged by deep economic and social disparities. One quarter of the City's residents live below the poverty line, a percentage that far exceeds the national average. Immigrants, including the undocumented, continue to face systemic exploitation, and the quality of life for City residents varies significantly depending on neighborhood. According to DataHaven's most recent Community Index, New Haven has low rankings in the areas of Youth Opportunity, High School Graduation, Unemployment, Young Child Poverty, Severe Housing Cost Burden, and Life Expectancy.

The Trump administration's extreme anti-immigrant policies and executive orders have been acutely felt in New Haven. Immigrants are forced to contend with arrests in courthouses; an increase in arrests, detention, and deportation; and the threat of raids leading to family separation. Progressive and inclusive cities across the country have responded to the current anti-immigrant agenda by advancing policies that protect immigrant populations and principles of immigrant inclusion and integration.

New Haven should maintain its reputation as one of the nation's most progressive cities on issues of immigration by adopting new policies and protective measures. In addition, to create a City of opportunity for all, the administration must create a safety net that supports its most fragile and vulnerable residents while creating opportunities for all residents to advance and prosper.



First 100 Days

Recommendation 1: Commit to eradicating homelessness.

Begin the process of reviewing and revising the City's ten-year plan to end homelessness; the plan expired in 2017. Advocate for passage of a Homeless Bill of Rights by the Board of Alders. Support the Affordable Housing Commission in its efforts to study and issue policy recommendations.

Recommendation 2: Publicly affirm New Haven as an immigrant-friendly City.

Declare New Haven an inclusive City that welcomes all immigrants, irrespective of status. Uphold and revise the Executive Order signed in August 2019. Support a Sanctuary City Ordinance that delineates our obligations and affirms New Haven's designation as a Sanctuary City. Work with the Police Department and immigrant rights organizations to create a mechanism to facilitate the processing and granting of U visas to eligible immigrants.

Recommendation 3: Realign the Youth Services Department.

Restore the Youth Services Department under the direction of the Community Services Administrator. Reestablish the connection between the Youth Commission and the Youth Services Department, and ensure that the commission is empowered to recommend policy. Establish a collaborative working relationship among Youth Services, the New Haven Public Schools, the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Trees, the New Haven Free Public Library, and other youth-engaged City agencies, a relationship grounded in an understanding of each entity's distinct roles, responsibilities, and program offerings.

by using shared resources. Promote Property Tax Relief for Seniors to help seniors stay in their homes and reduce appeals to the Board of Alders Tax Abatement Committee. Explore possibilities for expanded youth-elderly programming within senior centers, schools, and other community spaces.

Recommendation 3: Expand summer job opportunities for youth.

The limited scope of the current Youth@Work program leaves many teens unemployed during the summer. Actions to take: Seek partnerships to support expanded job opportunities in local nonprofits and businesses. Work toward the goal of ensuring that any child age sixteen and up can obtain a summer job.

Recommendation 4: Enhance support for the immigrant community.

Identify resources to coordinate the provision of services to protect immigrants, encourage integration, and work to fully realize the potential of immigrant families to enrich our community. Priority areas include improved language access, youth, integration, family self-sufficiency, and Know Your Rights education. Review current application forms for licensing permits and either remove a request for a Social Security Number or allow for the use of an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number. Conduct annual training for educators and others who work with youth and immigrant families on best practices in the support of undocumented and immigrant students and their families. Explore an immigrant legal defense fund to help provide legal representation for New Haven residents facing deportation. Develop raids preparedness plans for City Hall and the New Haven Public Schools and ensure the relevant staff are informed.

Two Years

Recommendation 1: Coordinate the work of human services across departments to maximize impact, efficiency, and effectiveness.

Many programs serve similar populations of residents as well as residents who can be activated for service to the community. We need to think broadly about how to address needs concurrently and creatively across existing program and departmental lines and how to expand and enhance programming in support of youth, including, in particular, queer youth of color, the elderly, the disabled, and those reentering the community after imprisonment. We also need to develop pathways for those who receive services to later engage as leaders in support of others in need in our community.

Recommendation 2: Assess senior services and expand senior-youth programing.

Evaluate accessibility and programming at the three senior centers operated by the Elderly Services Department. Consider additional accessible locations for expanded senior services

Recommendation 5: Integrate food insecurity into human services priorities.

Develop formal partnerships to promote healthy living and food and establish educational workshops around health and nutrition. Develop strategies to eliminate food waste. Encourage the creation of farmers markets in all neighborhoods, especially those in food deserts, including the Dixwell, Newhallville, West Rock, Dwight/West River, and Hill neighborhoods.

Recommendation 6: Support keeping U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement out of the courthouse.

ICE has aggressively pursued a practice of hunting undocumented immigrants in New Haven courthouses, denying access to justice and due process for immigrants and leading to family separation. The City should work with the New Haven municipal court system to ban courthouse access to ICE, and it should support efforts to ensure that the Connecticut Judiciary follows other states (Oregon, New York, New Jersey) in banning ICE from courthouses.

Recommendation 7: Implement wage theft protections and establish labor standards.

Wage theft and the rampant exploitation and abuse of immigrants, especially the undocumented, are among the most persistent problems facing our immigrant working population. Initial steps: Revoke or suspend licenses of businesses found to have committed wage theft and/or retaliation against workers complaining of wage theft; allow for stop-work orders for businesses in violation; and do the same with findings of sexual harassment. Train police and prosecutors investigating wage theft cases and prosecuting employers who threaten or engage in retaliation. Engage federal, state, and City officials and community members in establishing local labor standards. Via a small

increase in business licensing fees, explore grants for community organizations that inform workers of their rights, identify instances of wage theft and sexual harassment, and refer victims to state enforcement programs.

Longer Term

Recommendation 1: Invest in “Housing First” policies to address homelessness.

Develop solutions for ongoing challenges and strategies to prevent homelessness. Tackle chronic problems related to homelessness, including homeless encampments and the need for emergency housing for elderly people and women. Craft an agenda that makes the connection between homeless services and job opportunities explicit, facilitating the transition for families and individuals from homelessness to permanent housing, stable employment, and economic stability. Partner with the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities Homelessness Prevention Task Force for resources and technical assistance. Lower or remove barriers—such as sobriety and credit history—to place those experiencing homelessness directly into living situations with wraparound support services, rather than moving them through different levels of transitional housing. An example of a successful model is the Housing First policy in Madison, Wisconsin.

Recommendation 2: Streamline and coordinate reentry services.

Create a one-stop hub to facilitate collaboration among City departments and community organizations that support the reentry community, including those dealing with mental health services, health care, behavioral health, workforce development, job development, family reunification, support groups, education, court-ordered services, legal services, benefits assistance, transportation,

pardons, and housing assistance. Establish a collective impact framework to coordinate the work across different service providers and allow service providers to create joint benchmarks and measure progress toward goals.

Recommendation 3: Revamp and revive the Elm City Resident Card program.

The New Haven municipal ID card, in addition to serving as a form of ID, provides access to the City's libraries, beach, golf course, and various services. This initiative, a first in the nation that emerged from New Haven, is now largely dormant: few City residents are aware of the existence of this program, and there have been no efforts to innovate it. Actions to take: Upgrade and revive the program;

increase outreach and marketing efforts; re-create the mobile unit to ensure access to all residents; and create additional uses, such as prepaid debit card availability and help with other municipal, cultural, educational, and financial services.

Recommendation 4: Explore "Adopt a Park" partnerships with businesses and residents.

For a minimum annual donation, businesses and residents could receive recognition. The program would cultivate community pride and ownership and ensure ongoing added resources for park maintenance and enhancements.



Photo: Sarah Miller