



Kate Harrison
Councilmember, District 4

CONSENT CALENDAR
April 11, 2023

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
From: Councilmember Harrison
Subject: Referral to the June 2023 Budget Process as a sole source procurement contract for Two Full-Time Social Workers for Social Justice Collaborative

RECOMMENDATION

Refer \$147,000 to the June 2023 Budget Process as a sole source procurement contract for annual staffing costs associated with funding two social workers to provide low-income immigrants, asylum seekers, unaccompanied children, young dreamers, and displaced families with direct legal services and legal representation.

CURRENT SITUATION, EFFECTS, AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

The Social Justice Collaborative (SJC) is a community-based legal non-profit, dedicated to serving low-income immigrants, asylum seekers, unaccompanied children, dreamers, and displaced families through direct legal services and legal representation in court at little to no cost.

Since its inception, SJC has provided full-scope deportation defense and asylum representation for some of the most difficult cases. While SJC attorneys can provide high quality legal aid to individuals in need, many clients are survivors of violent displacement and government oppression and require help beyond what SJC's legal team can provide. The legal aid portion of services, while the main and most significant focus of SJC, does not address the entire healing process associated with obtaining asylum and United States citizenship. Unfortunately, mental health care is not easily accessible for immigrant communities and less so for Indigenous Guatemalan (Mayan-Mam) immigrants, who SJC prioritizes serving. In 2016, Mam became one of the ten languages most frequently spoken in immigration court¹. More than a quarter of SJC's clients (34% as of 2021) are Mayan Mam-speaking and SJC has one of the highest numbers of Mayan Mam speakers on staff providing accessible legal and social work services.

¹ "Eoir 59 Certification and Release of Records - United States Department ..." Departmentofjustice.gov. Accessed March 17, 2023. <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1380121/download>.

SJC is the only organization that provides this scope and breadth of free and reduced cost services to clients. Bay Area Legal Aid is an organization that similarly provides assistance to low-income people in need of free legal aid, however, they do not deal with DACA or any other immigration matters. While other organizations like Centro Legal de la Raza and East Bay Community Law Center provide immigration assistance, they do not have Mayan-Mam speakers on staff, making services inaccessible to those who are exclusively speak Mayan-Mam. SJC occupies a unique and significant role to support a population of immigrants unable to receive assistance anywhere else in the Bay Area.

Social workers have the professional training and capacity to provide SJC's clients with comprehensive and holistic care, critically serving minors and families who are struggling to adjust to life in the United States.

In 2023, there is a heightened awareness of the issues that Immigrants and Asylees must confront when facing the immigration system. Most people now know that in addition to the turmoil presented by the system, immigrants including very young children do not have a right to an attorney. This makes an incredibly difficult process to navigate almost impossible.

Hiring full-time Social Workers is the most cost-effective way to address SJC's client's needs. In the past, SJC has partnered with California State University, East Bay, and Stanislaus in order to have unpaid social work interns available to support clients. The intern program has demonstrated how crucial it is to have social workers as part of the SJC team. They are able to thoughtfully and expertly address the needs of clients beyond attorneys' capacity, allowing attorneys to focus on difficult case work, and are well-versed in assisting clients in navigating services and resources. However, the reliance on unpaid students, who must be supervised by someone not affiliated with SJC and who only work part-time, dramatically limits the number of clients an intern can serve. There are also periods of time between interns, a difficult situation for clients whose cases can and do sometimes last for years.

BACKGROUND

Social Justice Collaborative (SJC) was founded in 2012 to ensure that low-income immigrants in Northern California have legal aid and assistance for little to no cost. SJC specializes in deportation defense, but their attorneys and legal staff have extensive experience working on a wide range of cases, including DACA, visas for victims of human trafficking, and Asylum litigation in immigration court. As its team has grown, so has its capacity to take on a higher number of cases. Services include case building, court and interview representation, partner referrals as needed, and family reunification efforts, where possible.

In 2018, Social Justice Collaborative acquired its own building and made the move from Oakland to Berkeley. Throughout its history, it has served immigrant families in Berkeley, assisting Berkeley residents who are victims of crime, domestic violence survivors, and asylum seekers. SJC's clients range from those just beginning their

immigration case to those who are now lawful permanent residents and may soon qualify to naturalize.

The majority of SJC's clients reside in the East Bay. SJC does, however, serve all Northern California and the Central Valley, providing assistance to a diverse client base, with an emphasis on indigenous Asylum seekers. Within the last decade many lower-income immigrants in Berkeley have been displaced as living costs increase and reside in surrounding cities. However, SJC clients do significantly contribute to the city of Berkeley by working in a variety of industries including the service industry, construction as day laborers, or as housekeepers or caregivers.

SJC also upholds close partnerships with other organizations established in Berkeley. SJC and The University of California, Berkeley have been long-standing partners. UC Berkeley has students from their undergraduate program who serve as interns or in work-study positions at SJC to gain experience and knowledge. SJC works with the Law School to host Law Clerks and has hosted clerks who have gone on to work in the immigration field. At the moment, SJC is working to finalize a partnership with Berkeley Bowl to refer newly permitted workers.

Organizations from around California that provide similar services oftentimes refer clients to SJC, either because their funding cannot allow them to take clients on or because of the complexity of the legal case. In addition to providing direct legal services, SJC is part of coalitions that fight for state-wide policy to protect immigrant communities and have participated in the Mayor's Office round tables dedicated to Berkeley as a sanctuary city.

SJC has a very high (near 100%) success rate in immigration court and assists clients on appeal for those whose cases were not successful. It provides 100% of legal consultations free of charge, and 100% of minors are represented at no cost. Further, in 2021, SJC provided more than 1,000 hours of pro bono hours and represented 120 individuals through volunteer work. In 2021, SJC saved immigrant families over \$3.6 million dollars in legal service costs. SJC has won more than 300 cases, has filed upwards of 100 work permits and green card applications, and in 2022 was named one of the top local charities in the San Francisco Bay Area.

In ten years SJC has grown from three (3) staff members to 35, demonstrating the demand for expanded programs and services.

SJC does necessary and vital work in the Berkeley community, but needs additional funding to fill the critical gaps discussed above.

Overview of Proposed Staffing Costs

SJC is largely funded by state grants through the California Department of Social Services and The State Bar of California. It also obtains funding under the IOLTA program, as well as the ISF and UUM programs under CDSS. State funding is indispensable, but only covers a fraction of the work that SJC does. In order to keep

services affordable, SJC requires increased, varied, flexible funding and support. SJC was recently awarded funding to provide digital content to be shared by the Statewide Asylee Orientation Project but this project does not replace direct services to Bay Area Clients.

Staff Position	Salary per FTE /Year	Salary Cost	Taxes and Workers' Comp	Total
Social Worker (2)	\$65,000	\$130,000	\$17,000	\$147,000

FISCAL IMPACTS OF RECOMMENDATION

\$147,000.00 in staffing costs toward the hiring of two new full-time social workers for Social Justice Collaborative.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Not applicable.

CONTACT PERSON

Councilmember Kate Harrison, (510) 981-7140