

Immigrant Employee Support and Workforce Equity Initiative

Council Member Alvidrez and
Council Pro Tem Gonzales-Gutierrez



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What's the problem?

Immigrant employees face recurring obligations that U.S. citizens do not, including renewing their Employment Authorization Documents (EADs) to legally continue working, attending mandatory appointments with United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), participating in biometrics collection, and completing other federal immigration procedures. They must also pay substantial immigration filing fees and navigate complex legal processes. Without formal support systems, these burdens magnify workplace inequities, disrupt employment continuity and benefits, and undermine overall workforce stability.



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How we got here

- Some city employees are starting to be impacted due to delays with their immigration processes, and facing other barriers that have an impact on their work
 - I.e., DACA applications being delayed
- This issue was raised internally by city employees facing potential impacts due to their immigration status and the work authorization process being delayed.
- Internal conversations to find ways in which we can support



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Gaps in current city processes

- Currently OHR sends employees a notification 9 months before their Work Authorization expires, and there is limited support provided by managers and HR partners who do not have immigration expertise
- There is no standardized "expedited" rehiring practices beyond what's established in CSR Rule 5 and EO 135
 - Employees may be rehired noncompetitively in their previous classification if separated.
 - Background checks may be waived if rehired within one year.
- It is the agency's discretion to determine what to do with a newly vacant position, which can create inconsistency
- The city does not currently sponsor visas or permanent residency, and if this were to be considered, the city would need new specialized staff
- Employees rely on PTO, paid or unpaid leave or administrative leave at agency discretion. Lack of clear policies creates equity concerns and potential fear of retaliation.
- Terminations due to delayed USCIS processing negatively impact benefits (health coverage, probation, PTO accrual, service time, etc.).
- No Immigration filing fee assistance or reimbursements
- No specific Immigration Legal services offered as an opt-in benefit



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OHR Data (as of 8/10)

- Total of 14,186 City Employees
- There are nearly 100 employees working under immigration status (Defined as employees who provided work authorization under “An Alien Authorized to Work” on their I-9, which is the I9 category used by all temporary visa holders)
 - Less than 1% of the workforce
- The average cost of turnover is \$40,000. This is an average across all city positions and includes everything from hiring expenses to lost productivity.
 - It can vary widely depending on the type and level of position.



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OHR Data (as of 8/10)

- OHR has been tracking the terminations and resignations when they are related to work authorizations.
- From 1/1/2026 to 8/6/2026, there have been **9 terminations** due to expiration of work authorization.
- OHR does not track separately the workload impacts, but it is incorporated into the average cost of turnover above.



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Research done thus far

- Research done by a city employee that includes considerations
- Research by the City Council Central office
 - Highlighting some protections and rules some Education Institutions across the country have
- Urban Leader Fellows completed research about different ways in which the city could be supporting City employees who are undergoing an immigration process
 - Created a survey for city employees



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ULF Fellows: Research Highlights

- Renewal requirements and federal administrative delays can translate into workforce interruptions, employee turnover, service disruptions, and the loss of institutional knowledge.
- The burdens are financial as well as administrative. They identified federal filing costs including \$470 for an online EAD renewal, \$1,440 for adjustment of status, and \$760 for a paper naturalization application.



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ULF Fellows: Research Highlights

- Denver reported a 22.8% first-year employee turnover rate in 2024. It takes approximately 46.3 days to fill many City positions, meaning even temporary workforce losses can translate into weeks of reduced capacity.
- The memo reports that Denver HR estimates the broader cost when an employee leaves at approximately \$40,000, including candidate review, interviews, onboarding, and lost productivity, **and that estimate does not include the value of lost institutional knowledge.**
- A little retention can save a lot of money.



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Survey highlights

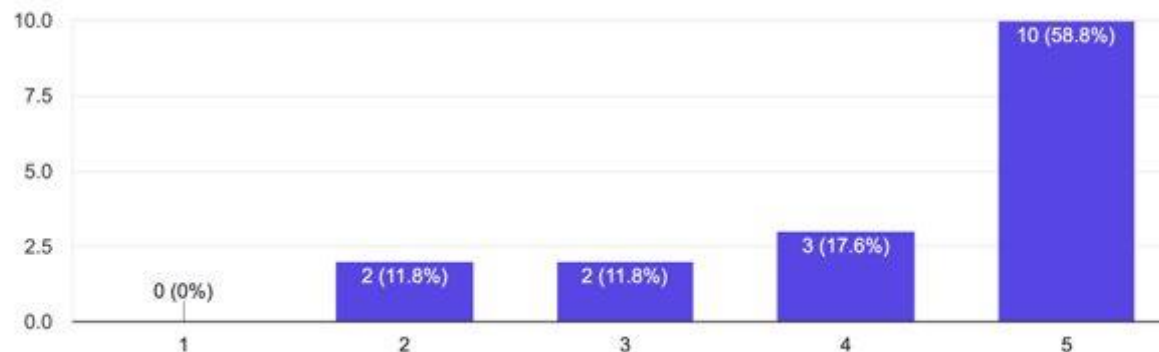
- Shared three times in the employee bulletin
- Even though the fellowship is done, the survey is still open
- We have gotten 17 responses, out of which 100% are employed by the City and County of Denver.



Link: <https://forms.gle/9zrc7n3Z6FZgG1ZE8>

On a scale of 1–5, how much stress have immigration-related employment requirements caused you?

17 responses

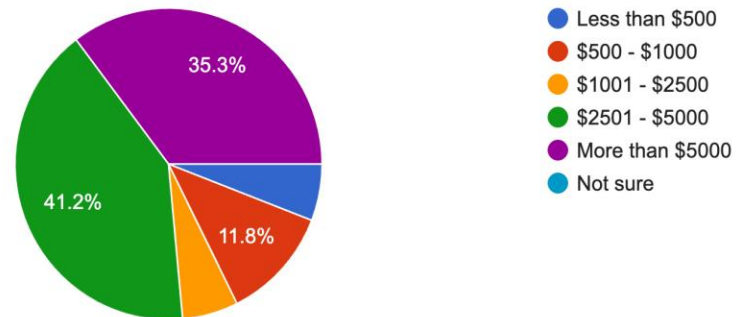


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Survey highlights

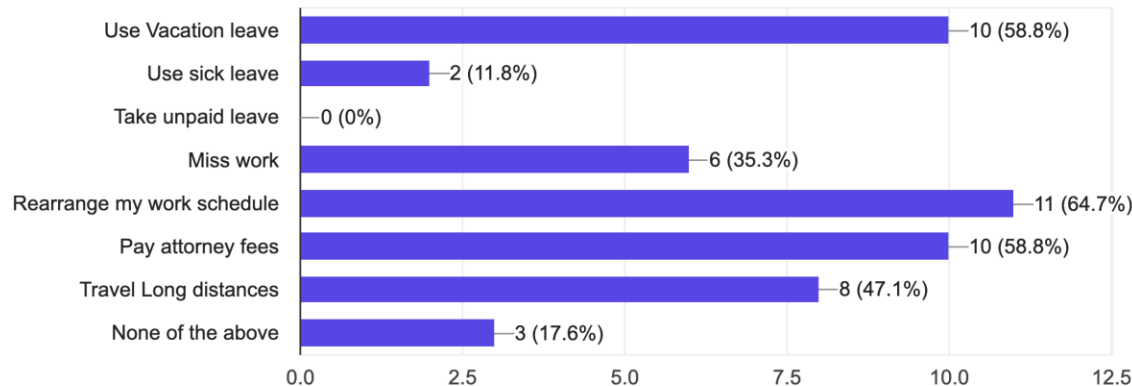
Approximately how much have you spent on immigration-related filing fees in the past five years?

17 responses



Have immigration-related appointments or document renewals required you to:

17 responses



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Survey highlights

- 8 out of 17 people said immigration processing delays have impacted their employment at some point.
- Top 5 workplace supports employees said would be most helpful:
 1. Access to immigration legal services
 2. Job security during USCIS processing delays (long-term unpaid leave)
 3. Employer reimbursement for USCIS filing fees
 4. Employer sponsorship where legally permitted
 5. Paid administrative leave for immigration appointments

Note: we are currently exploring the feasibility of these and other supports.



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Highlights from the Employee Feedback

"My life could be put into financial turmoil. Living and working with the knowledge that each of my EAD expiration dates may mean losing the best job I have ever had, causes so much unnecessary anxiety, stress and lethargy."

"It is so much harder than you know"

"While colleagues get to talk about what they have going on, I cannot share the absolute earth shaking reality that my entire life can be uprooted at any given moment due to my immigration status. It's isolating. It's hard. Yet we continue to show up because we care for the city and country we call our own..."

"I was terrified to ask for a day off for my immigration status due to retaliation, and unauthorized leave."

"...I feel supported by my direct leadership in some ways, but feeling supported by my employer would make an extraordinary difference in my life."

"... A more informed, compassionate, and supportive process would make a meaningful difference for immigrant employees and would better reflect the City's commitment to welcoming and supporting immigrant communities."

"If the City of Denver truly values and welcomes immigrants, I believe it should also invest in supporting its own employees throughout their immigration journeys. Immigration appointments are scheduled by the federal government—we do not get to choose the date, time, or location. We are expected to attend when notified, which often means taking time away from work with little flexibility."



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Meeting with OHR

OHR is researching and drafting Career Service Rule changes to soften the break-in-service impact for employees separated due to expiring work authorization, and they are looking at possible changes around re-hire, probation, PTO accruals, for this population.



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Recommendations being considered

- Create a position within HR to support city employees
- Create a standardized "expedited" rehiring process for employees who leave the job due to delays on their employment authorization approval
- Explore the possibility of having Employer-Sponsored Adjustment of Status
- Implement and fund an Immigration Filing Fee Assistance Program or an Annual Equity Reimbursement
- Provide Administrative Leave that would be a dedicated Leave category to attend their required processes
- Immigration Legal Services benefits
- Provide directory of resources for immigrant employees
- Employment protection during immigration processing delays

Additional recommendations might come up based on the next steps listed in the following slide.



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Where we are at and next steps

- Gather feedback from Council Members
- Review the Department of Safety's expedited rehiring process for applicability
- A City employee will go through Peak to develop a pilot model for fast-rehiring
- Connect with the Department of Finance to discuss financial components and potential cost structures
- Connect with the Mayor's Office
- Determine which recommendations require legislation and which fall under Career Service Rule changes
- Begin outlining proposals
- Move recommendations through the Council process



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Questions and feedback?



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