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Oct. 28, 2023

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

Thank you for your ongoing work and partnership regarding immigrants entering the United States via the Southwest Border. In particular, we, the Mayors of Chicago, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles and New York City write to share our appreciation for the supplemental appropriation you have proposed to help our communities navigate and support new arrivals, in particular the \$1.4 billion identified for food, shelter and services are much needed. This is an important step to address the humanitarian crisis impacting our cities.

We are also grateful for the work you have done to expand work authorization both for Venezuelans who arrived before 7/31 and for CPB-1 entrants, which will provide those populations meaningful access to work. While these courageous actions represent critical first steps, we believe additional action is needed and believe as the Mayors leading many of our most affected cities we can be helpful partners in identifying solutions. To address this crisis without further delay, **we are requesting an urgent meeting** with you to directly discuss ways we can work with your administration to avoid large numbers of additional asylum seekers being brought to our cities with little to no coordination, support, or resources.

We believe the following steps are critical to our shared success:

1. Additional federal funding.

While we are greatly appreciative of the additional federal funding proposed, our city budgets and local taxpayers continue to bear the brunt of this ongoing federal crisis. Cities have historically absorbed and integrated new migrants with success, but the challenges brought by the new border arrivals are due not only to the high numbers but also the diversity of nationalities, the large share arriving as families, and the overwhelming number who seek asylum. Given the impact this crisis has had—and continues to have—on state and local budgets **we respectfully advocate for additional funding**. Right now, Denver is spending almost \$2 million a week on shelter, New York City has surpassed \$1.7 billion in spending and Chicago has spent over \$320 million. Our cities need additional resources that far exceed the amount proposed in order to properly care for the asylum seekers entering our communities. Relying on municipal budgets is not

sustainable and has forced us to cut essential city services. We need additional federal funds to assist those who are arriving in our communities without hindering our ability to manage other city functions. We request an appropriation of **\$5 billion** to cover the expenditures our cities have already incurred and to continue serving the growing number of people arriving in our communities.

2. Accelerate approval of work authorization and adjudication for eligible applicants.

We are pleased to see expanded funding to expedite adjudication and work authorization approvals. We think it is critical that sufficient capacity is provided to meet your goals of 30-day turnarounds for work authorization. It is our understanding that a large population of newly TPS eligible individuals will still potentially wait upwards of six months to have their work authorizations processed and confirmed. Our cities are full of recent arrivals to the United States who have applied for Employment Authorization Documents (EAD) but await USCIS adjudication. Current wait times range from six months or longer because USCIS lacks the capacity to process applications in a timely manner. Funding for USCIS comes primarily from expensive fees charged to applicants requesting immigration or naturalization benefits. Increasing the speed by which EAD applications are processed is crucial to avoid additional backlog. We ask that supplemental funding earmarked for EAD adjudication and processing be provided to USCIS to lower processing times to under 30 days. The funding should include increased adjudication times for asylum seekers, and we further support waiving fees for applicants.

3. Dramatically increase access to work authorization.

While many states are thrilled to learn of the Administration's new TPS rule for Venezuelans, in many of our cities more than 75% of the folks currently in our shelters will not be eligible either under the 7/31 arrival window or the CPB-1 eligibility. All of the newcomers arriving in our cities are looking for the chance to work, and every day we get calls from business leaders who have unfilled jobs and want to hire these newcomers. The only obstacle to us helping them help themselves is federal restrictions on work authorization. Without any path to legal work, we know these new arrivals will have no hope but to end up homeless or reliant on long term public support. We can successfully welcome and integrate these newcomers and help them pursue the American Dream if they have a chance to work. We know that you and Congress will decide on the preferred policy for how many newcomers you want to admit to the country. Our strong request is that anyone who has arrived in this country and is approved with an Alien Registration Number, or A-Number, has the ability to work. This will alleviate much of the need for government support. Whether the solution takes the form of a significantly increased number of legal visas to work or accepted appointments through the CBP-1 app we can help you resolve this crisis if every newcomer arrives in our cities with a work authorization approved within the first 30 days of entry.

4. Adopt a collaborative federal approach around coordinated entry.

We believe that our cities and states can far better handle the flow of new arrivals if there is a coordinated entry and distribution process of newcomers once they arrive. This ability would increase dramatically if each

new arrival could access work authorization within 30 days. With work authorization provided we are confident that we could lead a coalition of cities that could identify shared available capacity, welcome newcomers in a way that would set them up for success and relieve the burden on border cities and destination cities receiving far greater numbers than can be supported. The federal government and nonprofit partners—not the governors of the states at which recent immigrants arrive—must coordinate the geographic movement of recent arrivals. The federal government has done this quite successfully with the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) that has regularly coordinated with communities across the United States to receive recently arrived refugees. We encourage the administration to work with nonprofit partners to coordinate the location and geographic movement of recent arrivals at the southern border, to include the placement of regional coordinators in major cities to help ensure that recent immigrants arrive where sufficient capacity exists.

We believe we have a unique opportunity to work with the White House and Congress over these next few weeks to create an immigration and asylum system that will treat our newcomers with dignity and be fair and equitable to cities and neighborhoods across the country. Given the urgency of this issue we are all willing to travel to DC next week to sit down and discuss our shared interest in finding a successful resolution.

Sincerely,



Brandon Johnson
Chicago Mayor



Mike Johnston
Denver Mayor



Karen Bass
Los Angeles Mayor



Sylvester Turner
Houston Mayor



Eric Adams
New York City Mayor

CC: The Honorable Mike Johnson, Speaker of the House of Representatives
The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries, House Democratic Leader
The Honorable Charles Schumer, Senate Majority Leader
The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Senate Minority Leader