



WHITEWATER POLICE DEPARTMENT

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The White House
Office of the President
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

President Biden,

I am writing to inform you of significant challenges the City of Whitewater faces related to ongoing demographic change, and I am asking for your assistance in obtaining resources to address the situation.

Whitewater is a small City of approximately 15,000 people. Since early 2022, the City has seen a rapid increase in the population of immigrants arriving from Nicaragua and Venezuela. We estimate that there are roughly 800-1,000 individuals who have arrived here in that short time. Each individual has a different reason for coming here; some are fleeing from a corrupt government, others are simply looking for a better opportunity to prosper. Regardless of the individual situations, these people need resources like anyone else, and their arrival has put great strain on our existing resources.

We know that these individuals have come here with a variety of legal statuses; some are seeking asylum, some await a federal court date, and others are here undocumented. As a municipal government, our focus is not on legal status, but rather ensuring we are providing the resources expected of a municipality to all residents of the City. Unfortunately, we are increasingly finding it difficult to do that.

Our police department has identified major challenges associated with the demographic change which have utilized a great deal of our law enforcement resources and made it increasingly difficult to police proactively. Communication, transportation, housing, and documentation/identification concerns are some of the top obstacles that we have been addressing.

Communicating with an immigrant population that generally speaks only Spanish has been a challenge we've worked to overcome by the use of costly translation software. We have found approximately three times the number of unlicensed drivers on our roadways compared to previous years. This occupies much of their time and takes away from our ability to serve in other aspects. Our officers have also seen first-hand the terrible living conditions that many migrants are living in. We've seen a family living in a 10'x10' shed in -10-degree temperatures. We've seen many over-occupied apartments that create non-familial living situations, which unfortunately has led to a number of situations involving juvenile victims of sexual assault. We've also encountered a significant trust barrier between the immigrant population and law enforcement. In many cases this has led to individuals providing false documents and misleading our staff, which further increases our time involved in investigating cases. Finally, our law enforcement staff have responded to a number of

serious crimes linked to immigrants in some manner including the death of an infant child, multiple sexual assaults, and a kidnapping.

None of this information is shared as a means of denigrating or vilifying this group of people. We know that challenges will come with the addition of any significant number of people to a City. In fact, we see great value in the increasing diversity that this group brings to our community. We simply need to ensure that we can continue to properly serve this group, and the entirety of the City of Whitewater.

With that said, we are in dire need of additional resources. We need additional staffing, specifically in the police department, but also in the form of an immigrant liaison position. These positions are critical to ensure we are addressing the immediate needs of this new population. In terms of law enforcement, our traffic enforcement numbers give insight into just how much we are struggling to continue to provide proactive service to our community. Our department averaged 2,437 self-initiated traffic stops annually from 2010-2021. In 2022, that number was reduced to 1,719, and in 2023, we are on pace for 1,246. That is an incredible statistic that shows how our staff is struggling to address the workload.

We also need resources to be able to fund programs aimed at improving the quality of life of our immigrants. Funding an immigrant liaison position would give us the ability to focus resources and deliver what our immigrant population needs. A number of non-profit organizations have taken great strides in providing this group with basic essentials like clothing and medical care. However, with additional funding, the City could begin to incentivize new initiatives such as ride-share programs, affordable housing opportunities, and language courses.

To close, I'd like to reiterate our need for assistance. The impact of demographic change that we are seeing in Whitewater is acute. It is unique in Walworth County and even in the State of Wisconsin. If direct funding is not feasible, then I ask that you to consider creating a grant opportunity that the City would be eligible to apply for. This is a critical humanitarian issue, and our City needs government assistance in order to continue to serve our entire community properly.

Thank you for your consideration,

Daniel A. Meyer
Chief of Police
City of Whitewater Police Department

John S. Weidl
City Manager
City of Whitewater

City of Whitewater Common Council