

September 10, 2019

Hon. Katjana Ballatyne, President Somerville City Council 93 Highland Ave. Somerville, MA. 02143

President Ballatyne and Honorable members of the City Council

On Behalf of The Welcome Project Inc., Somerville's immigrant organization. I write this letter to support the resolution submitted by Councilors Ewen-Campen and Mbah calling for a disparity study.

Over the past 2 years a new word has been used by many city employees and politicians. That word is equity. "Equity" has been used so frequently as a reason to continue to do things the way we've been doing them, yet not much has changed. MCAS scores for black and brown students continue to be atrocious and when compared to white students we see a huge achievement gap. Hiring of director's and other high-level city employees still of black and brown people is lacking. The green line extension which is coming to Somerville because of poor air quality for minorities living along the highways in the city continues to disproportionately displace people of color at a higher rate.

All of us can admit we need to better for all our residents. It is the belief of The Welcome Project that before we can build equitable solutions we need to first assess the landscape. How do we know what is and isn't working unless we evaluate and measure the work we're doing?

The Welcome Project builds the collective power of immigrants to participate in and shape community decision making. Our work with immigrant owned restaurants, YUM, demonstrates our commitment to ensuring equity within the business landscape. Over the years we have helped restaurants obtain liquor licenses, expand their locations, and help promote their businesses. Our annual event YUM: A Taste of Immigrant City highlights the diversity of Somerville's restaurants.

We further believe this assessment should encapsulate the following information for Somerville:

- Total number of businesses
- Total number of minority owned businesses
- Total number of women owned businesses
- Total dollar amount the city spends on using local businesses
- Total dollar amount city spends using minority owned businesses
- Total dollar amount the city spends using women owned businesses
- Percentage of minority owned businesses contracted with the city
- Percentage of women owned businesses contracted with the city

• Any barriers found in using specific businesses

These factors will help create a baseline for creating equitable based policies.

At The Welcome Project we realize institutional racism exist and it takes time to dismantle. It is ok for the city conduct a study and realize we can do better, however we cannot do better unless we understand the extent of the issue.

If Somerville believe in equity and in economic justice a disparity study is needed to ensure that any remedies are equitable and fair for all. I urge the Mayor to direct his staff to conduct the survey and hold a meeting with community stakeholders to discuss the findings of the study. The Welcome Project has a long history of working with the city to ensure equity for immigrants and we will continue to suggest policies and laws that promote the well being of all our residences.

Thank you

Il no

Benjamin Echevarria