



April 21, 2020

The Honorable Governor Brian Kemp
206 Washington Street
Suite 203, State Capitol
Atlanta, GA 30334

Dear Governor Kemp,

We write on behalf of Georgia's refugee and immigrant community to highlight the many ways that these Georgians are contributing to the health and safety of our state during the current COVID-19 pandemic and to ask your consideration of needed measures to support them during this time.

First, we thank you for your leadership in this crisis and your efforts to support Georgians during this difficult time. We'd like to tell you about some of the other heroes of this crisis: foreign-born Georgians who are working on the frontlines, keeping our farms, factories, stores, restaurants and hospitals running so that others can shelter in place.

Some of these heroes are Dr. Heval Kelli and Dr. Abraham Deng Ater, who fled war in their home countries and now save lives in the U.S. as an Emory physician and CDC researcher, and the refugee women of the Amani Sewing Academy, who are using their sewing skills to produce protective masks.

These men and women, like other refugees and immigrants, are amazingly resilient, having endured war, torture and other crises, and they are glad for the chance to give back to the country, and to the state, that extended them a lifeline in their time of need. What follows gives a glimpse into their contributions.

- **One in ten Georgians and one in seven Georgia workers, was born in another country.** The state's 1.1 million immigrants contributed more than \$26 billion to the economy and paid more than \$9 billion in taxes in 2018 alone.
- **Foreign-born Georgians are essential to maintaining Georgia's food supply during this crisis.** They make up more than 40% of farm laborers and 33% of poultry plant workers. They work in our warehouses, deliver our food, staff our grocery stores, and make our restaurants run.
- **Foreign-born health care professionals are making it possible to care for the rising number of Georgians suffering from COVID-19.** Nearly one in five Georgia's physicians (17%) is foreign-born, as are 10-20% of the state's nurses and health aides.
- **Foreign-born Georgians are critical to the state's economy and its eventual revitalization, owning about one-third of main street businesses.** Immigrant-owned businesses employ more than 200,000 Georgians and produce \$30 billion in sales each year.¹

¹Data from: <https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/locations/georgia/>; <https://cepr.net/a-basic-demographic-profile-of-workers-in-frontline-industries/>; <https://www.wabe.org/giving-back-immigrant-doctors-helping-immigrant-patients-in-georgia/>; <https://gbpi.org/2018/georgians-stand-lose-immigrant-crackdown-measure/>

We are also grateful for the countless native-born Georgians working right by their side, but we write to share the unique risks and challenges that foreign-born Georgians face during the current crisis.

- **Healthcare Access:** While all frontline workers are putting themselves and their families at greater risk of contracting the COVID-19 virus, foreign-born workers often lack access to health insurance and quality care. To ensure that all Georgians stay safe and healthy and curb the spread of the disease, we urge the state to **expand Medicaid to the fullest extent possible; eliminate lengthy enrollment periods for lawful permanent residents; and provide emergency Medicaid coverage for all COVID-related treatment.**
- **Economic Support:** Foreign-born Georgians are also bearing a large portion of the crisis' economic burden, as they run shops and work in jobs that have been particularly hard hit by state shut-down orders. Many hard-working immigrants have been excluded from COVID relief programs and need other support to get by and to help rebuild the economy when the times comes. To support these workers and their families, we urge the state to **order a moratorium on evictions and foreclosures.**
- **Workplace Health and Safety:** Many foreign-born Georgians still serving on the frontlines find themselves working in unsafe conditions and fear losing their jobs if they speak out or take time off to protect themselves. We urge the state **to impose workplace health and safety protections in compliance with CDC guidance² and provide hazard pay for essential workers at higher risk of infection.**
- **Language and Technology Barriers:** Compounding these problems are language and technology barriers that keep foreign-born Georgians from accessing COVID-related information and helplines, locate resources, and apply for assistance, such as small business loans and unemployment insurance. We urge the state to **ensure access to COVID-related information and resources in the multiple languages spoken in Georgia's foreign-born community.**
- **Participation in COVID-Related Task Forces:** Foreign-born Georgians are vital to the state's COVID-19 response and recovery. To ensure that their voices are heard and that resources are able to reach their communities, we urge the state to **include nonprofit representatives of the refugee and immigrant populations on COVID-related task forces and planning committees.**

Thank you for considering these measures to keep all Georgians, regardless of their immigration status, safe, healthy and supported during the COVID-19 crisis. To talk further, please contact Jim Neal, CRSA Chair, at jimneal@friendsofrefugees.org.

Respectfully yours,

The Coalition of Refugee Service Agencies & The Business & Immigration for Georgia (BIG) Partnership

² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html>

CRSA Members

Burmese Rohingya Community of Georgia
Catholic Charities Atlanta
CDF: A Collective Action Initiative
Center for Pan Asian Community Services
Center for Victims of Torture
Clarkston Community Center
Eritrean-American Community Association of Georgia
Friends of Refugees
Georgia Asylum and Immigration Network
Global Village Project
Inspiritus
International Rescue Committee in Atlanta
Jewish Family and Career Services
Latin American Association

New American Pathways
Refuge Coffee Co.
Refugee Women's Network
Somali American Community Center
Syrian Community Network – Atlanta
Tapestri
World Relief Atlanta

BIG Members

Amplio Recruiting
Brand Vaughan Lumber
Georgia Budget & Policy Institute
Georgia Restaurant Association
Kevin Abel, State Transportation Board (GDOT);
Former candidate for US Congress