

**ISCU Memorandum on the Use of Champaign County ARPA Funds  
for Urgent Needs of the Immigrant Communities in Our County,  
presented at the Champaign County Board Study Session of July 19, 2021**

As others have already highlighted, the immigrant communities in Champaign County have grown significantly over the past decade in size, complexity and challenges. They include some of the poorest families in the county many of which were carrying out essential work for all of us during the pandemic, from meat packing in Rantoul to garbage collection in Champaign-Urbana. If the county, the cities, the school districts, the hospitals, other public bodies as well as faith communities and NGOs all seek to meet the needs of our immigrant families, to make their lives easier and better here and to create a welcoming environment for them, their talents, their vitality and their cultural diversity will become major assets and growth factors for Champaign County in the next few years and decades. As always in US history, immigrants can enrich our County materially and culturally, but for that to happen they need to be supported. If we fail in this endeavor, the County will face increasing poverty and social strains.

Some of our immigrant communities in the County have suffered more than other groups from the consequences of the pandemic: higher infection rates, higher unemployment rates – perhaps as high as 70% among Guatemalan families in C-U—greater difficulties with online-learning for their children, rapidly rising density of apartment, trailer and house occupancies necessitated by plummeting incomes, and, at the same time, much less access to federal, state and local assistance programs.

To prevent short term hardships from evolving into longer-term trends, it is critical that the County, along with the cities, school districts and other public entities include our immigrant communities in their planning of expenditures. Below ISCU will briefly sketch three projects that we urge funding for, in part or completely, by the County's ARPA. The following suggestions are general areas of need. If there is interest on the part of the County Board to further pursue these areas, ISCU would welcome preparing a more detailed plan. These suggested expenditures funds would directly benefit large numbers of immigrants in our County:

- 1. Housing:* Immigrant Services of Champaign-Urbana proposes that the County Board acquire emergency housing and possibly training for trailer and home repairs for immigrants in Champaign County, with the involvement of leaders in the immigrant community. The need for housing and economic integration of immigrant families has grown over recent years, and the pandemic has made these needs even more acute. Overcrowded and substandard housing conditions are ongoing barriers to good health and community participation for many recent immigrants. We propose to provide apartments or trailers to immigrant families for emergency situations, such as the need to quarantine, to deal with catastrophic income loss or domestic crises and to provide housing for newly arriving asylum seekers or refugees. A value-added component could be training in trailer and home-repair. These initiatives will become sustainable through a combination of affordable fees, grants and ongoing fundraising.

2. *Multilingual “Guarderías” or Daycare Centers:* Immigrant Services of Champaign-Urbana proposes that the County Board provide a number [a minimum of 4: 2 in Champaign and 2 in Urbana] of Daycare Centers specifically targeting immigrant communities and located at the heart of immigrant neighborhoods in our towns (e.g. some of the trailer parks). There are many immigrant families—often headed by women—with only one adult and several children. When the adult leaves for work, the supervision of the minors is often deficient: a young teenager, or a neighbor, for example. This situation leads to many social problems, all the way from neglect, insufficient attention to schooling, and potentially worse situations. Daycare Centers, staffed multiculturally and multilingually, located in close proximity to the residences of the immigrants can alleviate this severe problem and help the adults breathe more easily while providing for the welfare of the family. Ideally, a room for ESL training for adults would be attached to these daycare facilities, as it would allow an adult -again: often a woman - who is staying at home to supervise children – to advance knowledge of English while quality supervision of the children is being provided. These Daycare Centers can be used to train and develop skills in child education and increase involvement with organizations like the Crisis Center and Courage Connection
  
3. *Transportation Services:* Access to affordable transportation is a major hurdle for many immigrant families, that causes great expenses and severely restricts access to resources available to other residents of our County. For example, newly arrived immigrants who cannot navigate bus transportation to, and getting around in, Chicago, often must pay people offering rides to immigrants for appointments with the Immigration Court or ICE in Chicago. Such people routinely charge from \$200 per person and up to \$350 for the trip, which is a major proportion of their monthly income of many poor immigrants in C-U. Immigrants living in C-U at times see good job opportunities in Rantoul and those living in Rantoul see such opportunities in C-U. But there is no reliable, affordable transportation between the Rantoul and C-U. Use of MTD for poor immigrants is often intimidating or inaccessible due to language and literacy issues. Immigrant Services of Champaign-Urbana proposes that the County Board work with other public entities, such as the cities of Champaign, Urbana and Rantoul, and the RPCCC to establish public van service between C-U and Rantoul, especially during rush hours. The County could also purchase several vans that could transport immigrants on emergency trips to hospitals and perhaps provide transportation against a modest fee for required trips to Immigration Court, ICE and USCIS offices in Chicago and Indianapolis. Alternatively the County Board could support the development of an immigrant-run small business focusing on meeting the transportation issues mentioned.