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Cincinnati loves its immigrant past. What about its present? | Opinion

Immigrants account for 75% of Cincinnati's population growth.

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Cincinnati proudly celebrates the immigrant traditions that helped develop this region. We gather for Oktoberfest and Panegyri Greek Festival, sharing food from around the world and telling stories about ancestors who arrived here seeking opportunity.

The question is whether we extend that same welcome to the people building their lives here today.

Our public conversations too often reduce our immigrant neighbors to a label or a political argument. That is why Cincinnati Compass and the Immigrant and Refugee Law Center launched Neighbor to Neighbor: Building Bridges, Growing Regions, a regional campaign that brings immigration conversations closer to home. Through local stories and opportunities to connect, we invite residents to get to know the people behind the headlines.

So why does this matter? Well, the economic stakes are substantial. Since 2020, the Cincinnati region has seen a modest increase in population. It would have been far less without immigrants moving here. Since 2020, 75% of our population growth is due to immigrants, demonstrating that international migration is essential for our region.

Also, given that immigrants are more likely to be working age than their U.S. born neighbors, it is crucial that we attract immigrants to continue to grow and replenish our

aging labor force. New neighbors help fill crucial workforce needs, create jobs through entrepreneurship, and are a strong customer base our communities need to thrive.

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Across Ohio, immigrants paid an estimated $7.3 billion in taxes, $2.7 billion to Social Security, $723 million to Medicaid, and held $20 billion in spending power, according to the American Immigration Council. Those dollars help support public services and businesses. These facts dispel the myth that immigrants simply take from the communities where they live.

But no one should have to prove their economic value to deserve dignity.

Neighbor to Neighbor asks residents and organizations to become #BridgeBuilders. That can mean sharing a campaign story, inviting someone to a neighborhood gathering, or making an introduction that helps a family find a resource. It also means listening and checking the truth behind a claim before passing it along.

Cincinnati has an opportunity to change and humanize the conversation by amplifying truth and facts when it comes to our immigrant community. In the long run, it will make our future more connected and more prosperous.

Visit n2nmovement.org. Hear a neighbor's story. Take the Bridge Builder pledge. Then bring the conversation into your workplace, school, or neighborhood.

The welcome we extend today will help determine the Cincinnati we become tomorrow.

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