

PRESS RELEASE

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**Jersey City Council President Lavarro Announces Appointment of
First Three Members of the Immigrant Affairs Commission**

*South Asian Immigration Lawyer, Latino Civil Rights Lawyer, and Muslim Leader
to Join 9-Member Commission*

Jersey City, NJ — Jersey City Council President Rolando Lavarro announced the appointment of the first three of a nine-member Immigrant Affairs Commission (IAC), the first commission of its kind in New Jersey, which would advise Jersey City government on issues affecting immigrants including civil and human rights, social services, education, and business development.

This announcement comes at the heels of President Trump's executive orders to construct a multibillion-dollar wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, to strip federal funding from "sanctuary" states, and an imminent ban on entry of refugees from war-torn Syria and any immigrants from certain Muslim-majority Middle Eastern and African countries.

"The inaugural members of the Immigration Affairs Commission are exceptional, unwavering, and leading advocates for immigrant communities," said Lavarro. "Given President Trump's anti-immigrant policies and values, which have fanned the flames of anti-immigrant sentiment at an alarming scale, this Commission will be valuable in evaluating the impact of certain national policies to the most diverse city in the nation and ensuring that Jersey City protects all its residents from hate and prejudice."

Members of the IAC are all Jersey City residents and will serve without compensation. The first three appointees are:

- **JUAN CARTAGENA** is one of the nation's leading voices on equality and nondiscrimination who has successfully used the law to effectuate systems change for the benefit of marginalized communities. Mr. Cartagena is currently the President and General Counsel of LatinoJustice PRLDEF a national civil rights public interest law office that represents Latinas and Latinos throughout the country. He is a constitutional and civil rights attorney who has vast experience litigating cases on behalf of Latino and African American communities.
- **AHMED YEHYA SHEDEED** is the Founder and Board President of BAKKA Corporation, a non-profit established to strengthening the Egyptian and Muslim

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communities and advancing cohesiveness between these communities and others. He established a partnership with West Point, whereby each year cadets spend a weekend at the Islamic Center of Jersey City and tour many places of worship in Jersey City – such as mosques, temples, and synagogues. Mr. Shedeed coordinates the annual Egyptian Festival in Journal Square, and during the holy month of Ramadan, hosts an interfaith Iftar at City Hall. Mr. Shedeed is a member of the Homeland Security Interfaith Advisory Council, the FBI Newark Citizens Academy Alumni Associations Outreach Committee, and the New Jersey Attorney General's Muslim Outreach Committee.

- **HAMEL VYAS** received a B.A. in political science (with honors) from York University, Toronto, and her J.D. from Widener University School of Law. Ms. Vyas began her immigration law career in Buffalo in 1997, upon her admission to the New York State Bar. She is currently the Associate Dean, for International Personnel, and HR Regulatory & Compliance, at the Mount Sinai Health System. She served as immigration co-chair for the South Asian Bar Association, North America, and also served on the Board of Directors of the South Asian Bar Association of New York (SABANY), as well as Vice President; and served on the American Immigration Lawyers Association, (AILA).

Jersey City has been the target of then candidate and now President Trump's divisive rhetoric, even claiming he saw "thousands of thousands of people in Jersey City cheering" when the World Trade towers went down.

"We must remain vigilant or else the diverse fabric of our Jersey City community will unravel and suffer under this Trump administration," said Lavarro. "The Immigrant Affairs Commission will be critical in evaluating and recommending policies that will allow all of Jersey City's residents to live with dignity, and for our diversity to continue to be an asset to our city."

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, of Jersey City's estimated population of 259,261, about 40% (104,567) are foreign-born. Some characteristics of Jersey City's foreign-born population include:

- Naturalized citizens: 44% (46,932)
- Median household income: \$64,665
- Educational Attainment (of age 25 and above): 84.5% - High School diploma or higher; 50.4% - Bachelors or graduate or professional degree
- Region of Birth: Latin America - 33% (34,769); Asia - 49% (51,621); Europe - 6% (6,747)

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- Top 5 Countries of Birth: India (22,285); Philippines (13,264), Dominican Republic (8,920), China (5,942), Egypt (5,183)

A council resolution from 1996, declared the City of Jersey City a safe haven or sanctuary for its non-citizen residents. In November of last year, the council passed a resolution reaffirming that "City resources are not to be used to identify, persecute, apprehend, or deport any non-citizen resident".

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