TREASURER MOVES OAKLAND COUNTY TOWARDS INCLUSION WITH “DON’T ASK” POLICY TO PROMOTE FINANCIAL WELLNESS OF ALL, REGARDLESS OF CITIZENSHIP OR IMMIGRATION STATUS

Pontiac, Michigan – During the past 10 years, Oakland County Treasurer Andy Meisner has never questioned the immigration or citizenship status of residents seeking the services of the County Treasurer’s Office, and now, the office won’t ask as a matter of formal policy. On Wednesday, September 25, 2019, Oakland County Treasurer Andy Meisner announces a formal office-wide policy developed in partnership with Michigan United and the New Americans Campaign of not inquiring about citizenship or immigration status, along with support for other immigration-related initiatives, including the “Welcoming” designation adopted by the Oakland County Commission and led by Commissioner William Miller.

"The Oakland County Treasurer’s Office serves all residents of Oakland County, regardless of race, gender, age, disability, physical characteristics, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, religion, marital status, familial status, domestic partner relationship, veteran status, citizenship, national origin, immigration status, or other protected characteristic under applicable federal, state or local laws or ordinances. Today, adoption of this formal policy affirms our commitment to providing services for, and uplifting the financial wellbeing of, all of our residents – who are our neighbors, friends, and relatives. No property owner, taxpayer or resident should feel afraid to access our services, and with this policy, we take a step toward achieving the ideal of One Oakland.

“Immigrant workers, families, and students are a vital part of our communities and deserve the chance to live in dignity, not fear. We will stand with our community partners to provide culturally competent services to Oakland County residents. Oakland County has the highest percentage (12.4%) of foreign born residents of any county in Michigan.

County Treasurer Meisner partnered with a group of nonprofit organizations that serve immigrant communities to develop the formal policy and benchmarking it against national innovators in this area.

“I have lived in Oakland County for the last seven years and am on an H1B Visa because of a federal green card backlog. The Treasurer’s policy is crucial to ensure that I and people like me can avail themselves of the services of the Treasurer’s Office without fear of discrimination. Regardless of visa status, immigration status, or citizenship status,
everyone should be able to avail themselves of these services. It shouldn't matter whether you’re a citizen, a permanent resident, on a visa, or undocumented. I call on other Oakland County offices, including the Sheriff, to follow Treasurer Andy Meisner’s lead and implement similar policies,” Ramagopal Reddy of GCRiform.org said.

“As an undocumented immigrant there is a fear of going to government buildings and being questioned about your status. This new initiative that does not allow the Treasurer’s Office to inquire about someone’s status is a victory for the immigrant community of Oakland County. This will be a stepping stone for our county which will lead to other government officials not asking immigrants about their status or state identification. I have faith that Oakland County will be a place where immigrants feel safe and are not scared to go to government offices. I would like to thank Treasurer Andy Meisner for bringing this to our county and I am also asking other Oakland County officials to follow Andy’s lead.” Sara Calderon said.

Meisner, who speaks Spanish and a little Portuguese, also believes that his branch of government should employ people who look and sound like the community it serves.

“I immigrated from Vietnam and now work in the treasurer’s office. Today’s announcement of the welcoming policy is something we have already done for years. But now is the right time for government to speak clearly about access to services to all residents,” said Nga Huynh, an account clerk in Meisner’s office assisting with foreclosure prevention and accounting.

“When would this policy matter?”

The Treasurer’s Office performs thousands of transactions, information requests and taxpayer counseling sessions in a nationally acclaimed program called Community Taxpayer Assistance Meetings connecting property owners to financial advice and resources, all of which would be covered under the new policy. The proposed immigration policy specifically addresses the goal of empowering delinquent property owners, whether documented or not, to not be fearful of engaging the county when trying to avoid tax foreclosure. The policy instructs workers on how to interact with the public using the following clear guidelines:

“No Treasurer’s Office employee shall inquire into the citizenship or immigration status of any person, or engage in activities designed to ascertain the immigration status of any person unless required by law or by court order.”

A key aspect of the new policy is the Treasurer’s Office acceptance of photo identification issued by the person’s nation of origin, including foreign driver’s licenses, passports, and cards issued by consulate offices.

For more information about this policy, or Oakland County Treasurer Andy Meisner’s programs to help taxpayers avoid foreclosure, call 248-858-0782, or visit www.oakgov.com/treasurer.

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Welcoming Policy of the Oakland County Treasurer’s Office

WELCOMING POLICY


The Oakland County Treasurer’s Office (the “Treasurer’s Office”) will equally enforce the laws and serve the public without regard to immigration status. The immigration status of a person, and the lack of immigration documentation, should have no bearing on the way Treasurer’s Office personnel execute their duties.

The vitality of Oakland County, Michigan (the “County”), one of the most ethnically, racially and religiously diverse counties in the world, where one-out-of-eight of the County’s residents is an immigrant, has been built on the strength of its immigrant communities. The Treasurer’s Office finds that the cooperation of all persons, both documented citizens and those without documentation status, is essential to achieve the Treasurer’s Office’s goals of protecting life and property, preventing foreclosure, and resolving problems. The Treasurer’s Office further finds that assistance from a person, whether documented or not, who is willing to pay property taxes or prevent foreclosure is important to promoting the welfare of all County residents. The cooperation of the County’s immigrant communities is essential to prevent foreclosure and maintain public order, safety and security in the entire County. One of the Treasurer’s Office’s most important goals is to enhance the County's relationship with the immigrant communities.

2. Inquiries into immigration status.

No Treasurer’s Office employee shall inquire into the citizenship or immigration status of any person, or engage in activities designed to ascertain the immigration status of any person unless required by law or by court order.

3. Disclosing information prohibited.

No Treasurer’s Office employee shall disclose information regarding the citizenship or immigration status of any person unless required by law or by court order or such disclosure has been authorized in writing by the individual to whom such information pertains, or if such individual is a minor or is otherwise not legally competent, by such individual's parent or guardian.

4. Conditioning benefits, services, or opportunities on immigrant status prohibited.

a. No Treasurer’s Office employee shall condition the provision of Treasurer’s Office benefits, opportunities, or services on matters related to citizenship or immigration status unless required by law or by court order.

b. Where presentation of a Michigan driver's license or identification card is accepted as adequate evidence of identity, presentation of a photo identity document issued by the person's nation of origin, such as a driver's license, passport, or matricula consular (consulate-issued document), shall be accepted and shall not subject the person to a higher level of scrutiny or different treatment than if the person had provided a Michigan driver's license or identification card.