

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### CONTACT:

Ali Rice, [arice@iicenter.org](mailto:arice@iicenter.org)

### **MAYOR WALSH TO HOST ‘WE ARE BOSTON 2019: UNITED WE THRIVE,’ HIGHLIGHT CONTRIBUTIONS OF IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES**

*Event will highlight accomplishments and vision for supporting the City’s immigrants*

BOSTON – Thursday, November 21, 2019 – Tomorrow, Mayor Martin J. Walsh and the Office for Immigrant Advancement (MOIA) will host “We Are Boston: United We Thrive” at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, a day-long event of interactive workshops to connect immigrant-serving nonprofit organizations with philanthropic foundations and corporate partners, followed by a reception to recognize Veronica Serrato of Project Citizenship and the Irish International Immigrant Center for their work in immigrant advancement.

“At this time in our nation’s history, this event is a reminder of how much we have accomplished through working together and of the tangible steps we should take to make our City even more welcoming and inclusive,” said Mayor Walsh. “I am thrilled that we are honoring Veronica Serrato of Project Citizenship, the City’s partner for our annual Citizenship Day in Boston, and the Irish International Immigrant Center, a leading advocate for immigrants from every corner of the world.”

Prior to the reception with Mayor Walsh at 5:30 p.m., there will be a presentation on the contributions of immigrants to Boston’s economy. The interactive workshops for attendees will include the “Welcoming Economies” workshop by [Welcoming America](#) that reviews programs and strategies that other communities have pioneered to help include immigrants in the local community and economic development efforts. The [International Institute of New England](#) will also give a demonstration with local storytellers to help attendees consider how migration and culture shape both personal identity and workplace communities.

Mayor Walsh will give remarks and recognize Veronica Serrato of Project Citizenship and the Irish International Immigrant Center for their work in immigrant advancement. Veronica Serrato joined Project Citizenship in 2014 as its first executive director. In her first year, she formed a partnership with the City of Boston to offer Citizenship Day, the largest event of its kind in New England. Over the past six years, volunteers have served over 1,900 eligible immigrants with their naturalization applications through Citizenship Day and provided screenings to thousands more. In 2019 alone, low and moderate-income applicants saved more than \$166,000 in application fees through fee waiver application assistance.

"It is a privilege to partner with the City of Boston through my role at Project Citizenship to ensure that all immigrants understand and have access to the path to citizenship," Veronica Serrato, founding executive director of Project Citizenship. "Immigrants are the Pride of Boston, and I am deeply honored to accept this honor on their behalf."

Along with Project Citizenship, Mayor Walsh will recognize the [Irish International Immigrant Center \(IIIC\)](#) for their work with immigrant and refugee families, providing a comprehensive, multi-service approach to supporting families from more than 126 countries. The Center provides the legal, wellness and educational support immigrants need to gain stability, security, and build pathways to success. The IIIC was recently recognized at the national level for its advocacy for children affected by the federal government's sudden termination of "medical deferred action" for immigrants undergoing treatment for life-threatening medical conditions.

"It is an honor to be recognized with the City of Boston's Community Champion Award from Mayor Martin J. Walsh for our support of immigrant families from all nations," said Ronnie Millar, executive director of the Irish International Immigrant Center. "Building a society where all are welcomed and valued requires the devoted support of government, and the City of Boston has been a tremendous leader across the country in welcoming immigrants and partnering with immigrant support agencies. Over the past 30 years we've received strong support from the City of Boston, and we are very grateful for this award."

At the reception, Mayor Walsh will share accomplishments of the Office for Immigrant Advancement (MOIA) and highlight his vision for MOIA moving forward. Launched in 2017, the City partnered with private donors and philanthropic foundations to form the Greater Boston Immigrant Defense Fund, which strives to increase education and access to legal services to defend its many immigrant communities, refugees, and temporary status holders. Over the past two years, the Fund has raised over \$1.11 million, which has allowed nonprofits to create new positions for six immigration attorneys and eight community advocates. The fund has increased the region's capacity to serve immigrants, and as a result, 363 legal cases have been opened and nearly 54,000 people have attended 796 community education events. In its third year, the fund has raised \$515,900, [including \\$50,000 in City funds](#).

Mayor Walsh has been outspoken in supporting federal policies that recognize immigrants as full members of our society. Most recently, he has signed onto an amicus brief to the U.S. Supreme Court in support of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), and provided economic analyses on the harmful effects of proposed changes to the public charge rules under immigration law to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Department of Justice, and the U.S. Office of Management and Budget.

Proceeds from We are Boston last year gave 10 immigrant-led community organizations the capacity to host immigration legal screening clinics, support hurricane evacuees, and organize family preparedness

workshops through a total award of \$100,000. This year's event will fund capacity building trainings in the short term, while MOIA will partner with philanthropic foundations to better support this capacity building work collectively in the long term.

*For more information, please visit <https://www.boston.gov/calendar/we-are-boston-2019>.*

**About the Mayor's Office for Immigrant Advancement**

The Mayor's Office for Immigrant Advancement works to ensure the full participation of immigrants within the civic, economic, social and cultural life of Boston. Every year, MOIA assists over 2,000 residents by connecting them to English language classes, helping them obtain citizenship application assistance, facilitating access to city services, and providing accurate information about immigration laws, which helps immigrants contribute socially and economically to the city. For more information go to: [www.boston.gov/immigrants](http://www.boston.gov/immigrants) or call 617-635-2980.

**About the Irish International Immigrant Center**

See [www.iiicenter.org](http://www.iiicenter.org) for more information on the IIIC's ongoing work to support immigrant families in Greater Boston.

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