COVID-19 Crisis Barriers & the Populations of Buford Highway Corridor
April 14, 2020

Summary: This document serves as a topline of recommendations to raise awareness around specific impacts of COVID-19 within our undocumented, documented, and mixed immigrant status communities of the Buford Highway (BuHi) Corridor. Through narratives and data points collected from local missions and efforts, our goal is to provide Georgia’s newly created, COVID-19 Task Force Committee, percipient optics for considerations into the barriers, needs, and risks effecting the concerns for vital humanitarian services during a time of extreme perils.

To be respectful of everyone’s time, we lead this document with a bulleted list of recommendations through the following section (page 2):

How the COVID-19 Task Force Committee can positively impact and engage these populations?

The remainder sections include vital narratives and data points that shape our sense of urgency and recommendations:

- **Demographics**
  To whom we need to include when we plan around public initiatives

- **Community Insights**
  Overview of relevant findings, data, and narratives from agencies working closest to populations

- **Needs Sought & Risks**
  What do these populations need, how are they motivated, and the risks if we do not reach them?
Response Planning and Considerations: A Time for Action

We hope that the Governor’s COVID-19 Task Force Committee will take the following as vital steps to include in its public serving initiatives that directly supports and addresses the factors presented in the other sections of this document. Below is a list of desired concessions:

- We request that all food distribution (food banks and school districts) is done without a state ID (or expand the list to ANY picture ID, including student ID’s, passports, etc.).
- We are particularly interested in securing testing AND treatment to those undocumented and legal permanent residents with a green cards less than 5 years that per Medicaid requirements are non-eligible for the benefit.
- There is funding in the CARES ACT for health centers and safety net clinics, the committee must extend these services and benefits to ALL Georgians, determined as people currently living in the state independently from their documentation status.
- In order to ensure micro and small businesses continue to operate and pay taxes in our communities, in order to make sure landlords receive payment, the state must provide grants for organizations working with undocumented individuals to provide rent assistance AND explore a suspension of evictions and encourage the development of a sensible payment plan for these families.
- We’d like to see increased efforts toward public service and awareness messages (PSA’s) in multilingual outputs (Spanish, Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, Bengali, and Arabic) and targets, these include digital billboards, digital social advertising (public websites, social platforms, etc.), direct mail, text services, for an equitable outreach effort of communication.
- We’d like to see an increased number of multilingual staff resources to aid the Governor’s Press Secretary as populations figure out how to navigate through the federal and state support programs such as the Small Business Administration and Department of Health; and to publicize the information in a close to real time manner as possible.
- We urge the Governor to consider a stimulus relief aid package to small restaurant and service business industries, a direct hit into our mom and pop immigrant business communities. Massage services, nail shops, restaurants, have all been hit with no sight of solutions or relief, in sight.

Demographics: The Underheard and Underrepresented

There is nothing more unknown about the multicultural fabric that is Buford Highway, an approximate 8-10 miles stretch that ties three of Atlanta’s major metropolis areas, then its people. Characterized as a vibrant, diversely represented community of residents and businesses who live, work, study, and play, for over 40-years, has also been a community, widely ignored in terms of social rights and representation. According to an October 2017 release from the American Immigration Council, in Georgia, 1 in 10 residents is an immigrant, while nearly 8 percent of residents are native-born U.S. citizens who have at least one immigrant parent. 375,000 undocumented immigrants comprised 36 percent of the
immigrant population and 3.6 percent of the state population, in 2014. These figures do not include undercounted and those undocumented. Georgia has a significant immigrant community, here are some data points to consider in terms of lives impacted:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Foreign-Born</th>
<th>Citizenship*</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doraville</td>
<td>10,422</td>
<td>47.7% (4.9K)</td>
<td>61.4%</td>
<td>Hispanic/Latino (5.77K)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chamblee</td>
<td>28,433</td>
<td>35.8% (10.2K)</td>
<td>72.1%</td>
<td>Hispanic/Latino (11K)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brookhaven</td>
<td>52,382</td>
<td>23.5% (12.3K)</td>
<td>83.2%</td>
<td>Hispanic/Latino (12.9K)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlanta</td>
<td>498,073</td>
<td>6.59% (32K)</td>
<td>95.4%</td>
<td>Black or African American (252K)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*National Average: 93.2%
**Highest Race/Ethnicity other than Caucasian
Source: datausa.io (2017 stats)

Community Insights: A Bird’s Eye View into Challenges

There are five core areas of focus presented in this section, most are straightforward humanitarian needs and services, others fall under general public and economic consequences: all of which impact current policy-making practices and processes during a time of extreme needs, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. As this recent article titled, Out of Work, Undocumented Families Within City of Atlanta Find Few Options For Aid, from WABE reports, “As the coronavirus outbreak causes people across Georgia to lose their jobs, there’s been a surge in requests for assistance with rent, food and other bills”, these challenges are multiplied for the immigrant communities. The breakdown of topic areas includes: Food (and water) Security, Testing (Health), Housing & Rental Assistance, and Public Service Messaging.

**Food (and water) Security:** There are over 500,000 people living in Georgia with at least one member of their family being undocumented, and often the undocumented persons are parents or head of households. This means that a significant populous in this state, is beyond reach and limited to receiving food from many of the food distribution and food bank efforts as those often require a state ID to receive these life essentials.

Additionally, school districts, particularly of those designated as Title I, are often operating through a drive-through model that effectively restricts access to those with vehicles and a drivers’ license, positioning undocumented individuals to desperate means so they can feed their
children. A majority of Dekalb’s Region I schools along the corridor, fall within the Title I designation. Moreover, when requiring children to be present in order to receive meals, these same humanitarian need initiatives are in turn, endangering the health and wellbeing where in a state of shelter-in-place enforcement codes, encouraging a one-person rule to acquire essentials for the sake of keeping families safe in their homes, doesn’t seem to apply for these undocumented, immigrant populations.

School districts like Fulton County, have recently changed their meals service programs based on the Center for Disease Control’s released precautions for employees of essential services, further adding to the already limited resources and processes in place to support those with lessened access to food (and water).

**Testing (Health):** The CARES ACT specifically notes that FREE COVID-19 testing is exclusive for those that meet current Medicaid eligibility criteria, thus utilizing a federal mandated framework as a qualifier to accessing FREE COVID-19 testing. In a recent article by The National Law Review, titled, [CARES Act: Foreign National and Immigrant Eligibility for Paid Leave, Unemployment Benefits](https://thenationallawreview.com/news/cares-act-foreign-national-and-immigrant-eligibility-for-paid-leave-unemployment-benefits), recognizes that “Immigrants and foreign nationals in the United States may be eligible for some or all of the listed benefits, depending on the circumstances.” In Georgia, because of previous decisions to not expand Medicaid, this qualifier can potentially result in many people and lives, falling through the cracks. In a 2016 research conducted through [Princeton University](https://www.princeton.edu/), their conclusion and recommendation revealed, “Georgia should expand Medicaid immediately under the standard framework and conditions outlined in the Affordable Care Act”, as a solution to addressing the growing health crisis needs within minority communities, these findings of course predate the current pandemic, which only adds to the levels of needs. Our current pandemic, snowballing these findings and adding to the urgencies of what has already been identified.

There are very few locations providing healthcare services with a sliding scale for undocumented individuals, for example, [Mercy Care](https://www.mercycare.org/) is only accepting emergency intakes. The recently available, drive-up testing site require ids and vehicle transportation. Neither of which can be met by our populations.

**Emergency Housing & Rental Needs:** Through our research, the CARES Act does not account for undocumented and mixed status families on their provision for economic stimulus payouts. The act notes that ALL taxpayers receiving the stimulus should file with a Social Security Number, further requiring that all individuals included in the application must be identified with a Social Security Number, as well. This requirement immediately, segregates our mixed status families while exacerbating the already, high stress conditions our undocumented families live under.
“normal” circumstances. These circumstances include limited access to work, resources and health services. The COVID-19 pandemic increases critical points and urgencies for more access solutions.

Public Service Messages, Economic Shortfalls & Language Barriers: Navigating through the various resource links can be challenging for the average English-speaking person. For our Limited English Proficiency (LEP) populations, livelihood, and the tasks needed to fulfill this, are nearly impossible. In Georgia, with Korean being the third most spoken language behind English and Spanish, a translated website serves only part of the engagement process, there needs to be more initiatives (and resources) towards targeted, population messaging and outreach efforts. Furthermore, as more and more Asian Pacific Islander (API) owned small businesses are being forced to shut their doors as first-response towards solution, the Small Business Administration applications require four to five navigational steps and for both the Economic Injury Disaster Loan Application and the Payroll Protection Program, are limited to a single, non-English language, leaving out large Asian Pacific Islander (a group targeted with growing xenophobic hate crimes), business owners in the process.

Service Stimulus & Economic Consequences: An entire industry of hospitality services is on the brink of severe survival, those along the Buford Highway heavily included. We started this document with what we don’t know of the area, its people; in this section, we dive into what this area is iconic for, its authentic restaurants and small business services (massage, spa, nail shops). Cities like Chamblee (by way of this online survey), are taking small steps to collecting data for finding out economic impacts and shortfalls. As mentioned above, the barriers specific to the BuHi area is access and representation. For example, this survey being in English, limits some to voicing their figures and relevant data points to the overall impact and conversations. Our mission hinges on the very survival of the Buford Highway of 40 years, as we know and love it! Our work is to ensure that we have a seat at the table in discussions and plans around urban development, where integrity, inclusion, and influence around the multicultural fabric remains for generations to come. The survival of this market is in direct correlation and dependencies on the survival of these businesses.

Needs Sought After & Risks
The needs sought after are no different than any other individual, family, or community would expect during times when supply chain and access to lifelines are negatively impacted, and in most cases, stripped away. There is a deep lack of security (food, job, housing) that are unique to the undocumented immigrant residents of the Buford Highway corridor. These factors effect daily lives and decisions in ways to survive and protect themselves through the current state-wide ordinances. Many publications have raised awareness and perspective on this topic, one can argue that current ordinance requirements of sheltering in place, in and of itself, is a luxury limited to those who can afford the access and
security of food, shelter/housing, job, and benefiting from the financial assistance architecture of the CARES Act. According to The New England Journal of Medicine’s, Undocumented U.S. Immigrants and Covid-19, “The profound economic impact of these measures will be especially harsh for undocumented immigrants, many of whom work in service industries such as restaurants and hotels, or in the informal economy. Many immigrants will have no income and are excluded from the social safety net. Extreme poverty will extend to the more than 5 million U.S.-born children who have undocumented-immigrant parents. The $1 trillion economic relief package, which includes paid-leave benefits and direct cash for Americans, will not reach most undocumented immigrants or their families.”

Unlike majority populations, essentials need sought, come with very limited motivators, the main one being immigration status. For an undocumented, head of household, all decisions and solutions that impact every member of that family relies on the status of that individual, and in most times than not, they do not meet the very first qualifier question consistent in many of these state/national support systems and programs, “enter your social security number, or show your driver’s license.” Not accounting needs in the case of this world-wide pandemic, of what the general public and leaders see as minority figures can very result in a deliberate act of perpetuating the coronavirus, COVID-19 disease through a relentless cycle with continuous effect on the populous, majority. Furthermore, as a state that relies on workers with limited documentation within two industries of extraordinary economic impact (poultry & agriculture) it is doubly vital for the Governor and this team to extend protections and access to medical services and testing to undocumented and legal permanent resident families in Georgia. As we’ve seen with recent news around Tyson and most recently, Smithfield, the risk is much higher than the decision of taking preemptive measures towards safeguarding the workforce with accessible testing procedures.

The unfortunate and dark reality is that if protections and coverage are not extended, people will die in their homes and infect their families.

About Us & Local Agency Contributor:

We Love BuHi (Buford Highway), brings individuals and communities together for multicultural experiences shared through our people, places, and stories to create connection, awareness, and belonging within Buford Highway’s international corridor. We Love BuHi envisions a community within Buford Highway’s international corridor that fosters integrity, inclusion, and influence.

Latino Community Fund (LCF Georgia), is a catalyst for investment, collaborative work, and positive narrative for the Latinx/Hispanic communities of Georgia. They serve to be the most trusted connector between funders, nonprofits, individuals, and businesses working within the Latinx communities of Georgia.