



Coalition of African and Caribbean Communities in Philadelphia
Advocating and organizing for stronger African and Caribbean Immigrant and Refugee Communities

Testimony prepared for city Council Hearing on Resolution 210041
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My name is Eric Edi. I am the Executive Director of the Coalition of African and Caribbean Communities (AFRICOM). I am also a faculty at Thomas Jefferson University College of Science and Humanities, where I teach Global Politics and Human Rights.

I greet and thank you for this opportunity to bring a portion of the voices of the members of Africom and the immigrants and refugees who are often absent or underrepresented in spaces like this one.

In 2001, when we formed AFRICOM, we aimed to advocate and organize so that African and Caribbean immigrants and refugees feel a sense of empowerment, belonging, and self-sufficiency in Philadelphia, the new home for so many.

To that end, we have operated multiple programs, including facilitating immigrant and refugees' access to health information and health care. We do not run a health clinic. However, we connect immigrant families to health services. We promote health information and materials, file applications for public benefits, host health forums and lunch and learn series, conduct focus group sessions about mental health and intellectual disability, Black men's access to health centers. Researchers from Temple University, the University of Pennsylvania, Swarthmore, and Bryn Mawr Colleges have relied on our network to complete research involving African and Caribbean immigrants.

For 17 consecutive years, our annual Health and Cultural Fairs Philadelphia gave hundreds of individuals and families opportunities to get screened for diabetes, HIV, Hepatitis and received valuable healthcare information.

With insufficient resources, our approach to healthcare access in Philadelphia has been difficult. Nevertheless, we have built TRUST.

TRUST is the rarest capital we all need to defeat Covid-19 collectively and equitably. In 2020, we banked on this asset to help African and Caribbean immigrants mitigate the pandemic's social and economic impacts.

Let me emphasize that Covid-19 has confirmed that grass-roots organizations and immigrant-led agencies are essential for immigrants. They were indispensable during the Census 2020 to reach hard-to-count communities. They are essential to reduce the literacy gap. They will be indispensable in all aspects of the fight against Covid-19.



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The FY 2020 Annual Report that we unveiled three weeks ago attests to the impact we have made in the lives of numerous low-income residents of Philadelphia. For instance, between March 15 and December 31, 2020, we provided direct cash assistance to **582** people. We provided COVID-19 related information to over 150 small business owners, specifically natural hair braiders, restaurant owners.

Based on these outcomes, we are surprised that our path to resources is more complicated and easier for others. We believe that the "Philly Fighting COVID" controversy, which has triggered Resolution 210041 and the current hearing makes it more challenging to reach hard-to-reach communities, specifically African immigrants. Why? Because

1. It perpetuates inequitable access to resources and handicaps black-immigrant-led agencies
2. It violates human rights considering that health is a fundamental right and that COVID-19 threatens that right
3. It amplifies the conspiracy theories both substantiated and unsubstantiated that circulate on social media or podcast shows.
4. I can attest that based on one-on-one conversations and ongoing outreach efforts; we firmly argue that many African immigrants are not sold out on the vaccine. Their views mirror what is going on in their countries of origin regarding access to the vaccines. South Africa's President, Cyril Ramaphosa, has accused rich nations of getting the vaccines for cheaper while African countries must pay twice as much.
5. There are also like me, who, because of past antecedents of Hepatitis B, are reluctant to take any shot or any medicine. Hep B affects over 60 million people in Africa.

In closing, let me reiterate that the City of Philadelphia should implement equitable access to resources and invest more in immigrant-led organizations and agencies to raise awareness about the COVID-19 vaccines. Philanthropic funders have invested in that route. The city of Philadelphia should follow that route.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak. We commend the city government for responsibly owning the Philly Fighting Vaccine debacle and making the efforts to restore trust.

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