MEMORANDUM

To: Mike Johnston, Mayor of the City and County of Denver
From: Sebastian A. Silva Hernandez, Policy Analyst, Denver Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs
Subject: Strategic Approach to Denver Immigration Policy Under the Trump Administration
Date: Thursday, April 16, 2026
Word Count: 691

SUMMARY

Denver needs to protect its immigrant communities, and the way to do it is through resilient legal protection paired with strategic noncooperation. The Trump administration's federal immigration push is hitting hard, and it's a direct hit to Denver's economy and to the social fabric of the city. We're recommending the third of the three options below:

- Option 1: Comply with Federal Immigration Directives
- Option 2: Maintain the Status Quo
- Option 3: Strategic Noncooperation and Resilient Legal Protection (Recommended)

What follows is the background on what immigrants mean for Denver, plus a side-by-side look at the three options based on who they affect and what they cost.

BACKGROUND

In Colorado, immigrants aren't a footnote. They make up 10% of the population and 12% of the workforce, and around 11% of people in the state grew up with at least one parent who came from somewhere else. The figures speak for themselves: in 2018, immigrant households paid $1.5 billion in state and local taxes, and their purchasing power came in over $14.2 billion (AIC, 2020; see appendix).

Colorado hasn't sat back on this. The Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition (CIRC) drove HB-1430 across the finish line, setting up a legal defense fund for immigrants and pushed through SB24-182, which opened access to state IDs and driver's licenses.

ANALYSIS OF ALTERNATIVES

Each option is weighed by how it affects the groups with the most at stake immigrant residents, local business owners, and the Denver Police Department. The comparison rests on three questions: what it costs the economy, how much community trust holds up, and how much political and financial risk the city must take on.

Option 1: Comply with Federal Immigration Directives

Denver would get in step with the Trump administration, handing over data and opening city resources to United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement ICE.

- Pros: Federal funding stays intact, and the city sidesteps a legal showdown with the White House.
- Cons: Community trust takes a hit it won't recover quickly, and the bond between residents and Denver police gets set back by years. Stripping workers out of the industries Denver runs on, construction (57,830) and hospitality (42,333) chief among them, would leave a hole in the labor market the city has no way to fill.

Option 2: Maintain the Status Quo

The city changes nothing. No new protection, no new conflict with the feds.

- Pros: No new spending, no restructuring, no federal attention pointed at Denver.

- Cons: Businesses and immigrants are left hanging. And without a real legal defense in place, deportations are going to creep up anyway.

Option 3: Strategic Noncooperation and Resilient Legal Protection (Recommended)

City resources stopped being used to carry out federal immigration enforcement. Funding for HB-1430 legal defense goes up, and data privacy protections get tightened.

- Pros: The local economy stays intact because the workforce stays. Public safety holds because the trust between the community and local government holds (CIRC, 2024).
- Cons: Federal pushback is likely, and some grants or aid could be at risk. It also means moving money around in the city budget with intent.

RECOMMENDATION AND NEXT STEPS

The city should go with Option 3, and it shouldn't wait. Yes, standing up to the current federal administration carries political and financial risks. But the cost of mass deportations, both to families and to the regional economy, is much heavier. Denver's labor market runs on its immigrant workforce. Break that, and a regional economic crisis follows (see appendix).

To do this work and keep the risks manageable, the city should:

1. Grow the legal defense network. Team up with groups like CIRC so that anyone facing deportation has a lawyer in their corner, and families stay together.
2. Lock down on data privacy. An executive order should stop municipal agencies, Denver Police included, from gathering or handing over immigration status info to federal authorities, unless a judge specifically orders it.

3. Get the word out. Roll out "Know Your Rights" campaigns with nonprofit partners so people know where they stand and the panic stops spreading.

Do these three things and Denver keeps its economy strong, its streets safer, and its residents, all of them, protected.

APPENDIX: DATA-DRIVEN IMPACT ANALYSIS

Table 1: Economic Impact of Immigrants in Colorado (2018)

Economic Metric	Value
Percentage of Immigrants in the Population	10%
Percentage of Immigrants in the Labor Force	12%
State and Local Taxes Paid	$1.5 Billion
Federal Taxes Paid	$3.5 Billion
Total Purchasing Power	$14.2 Billion

Source: American Immigration Council. "Immigrants in Colorado," 2020.

Table 2: Top Industries with Immigrant Workers in Colorado

Industry	Immigrant Workers
Construction	57,830
Accommodation and Food Services	42,333
Health Care and Social Assistance	42,061
Manufacturing	37,547

Source: American Immigration Council. "Immigrants in Colorado," 2020.

REFERENCES

- American Immigration Council. (2020). *Immigrants in Colorado*.
- Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition. (2024). *CIRC 2024 Legislative Report*.