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## **Massachusetts Gaming Commission visit Programs Funded by Community Mitigation Grants**

On Thursday, October 3, 2024, commissioners and staff from the Massachusetts Gaming Commission toured the Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center (BCNC) and the International Institute of New England (IINE). Both organizations are recipients of grants awarded by the MGC through the Community Mitigation Fund (CMF).

The Expanded Gaming Act established the CMF to support communities and eligible governmental entities in offsetting costs related to the construction and operation of gaming facilities. Since 2015, the MGC has awarded approximately \$56.7 million in funding to advance transportation, community planning, workforce development, and public safety initiatives for eligible municipalities and government entities near casinos. The CMF provided over \$18 million to 23 host/surrounding communities, and 10 regional entities during the last funding cycle. The CMF funds projects related to transportation infrastructure, pedestrian safety, community development, research, and public safety.

For half a century, BCNC has provided immigrants with the support and resources needed to thrive in the United States, including English as a Second Language (ESOL) classes and a program called *CustomerFIRST*, which teaches adult immigrants customer service skills based on a curriculum derived from the National Retail Federation. Upon completing the 16-week course, students can take an exam to earn an industry-recognized certificate, with the fee covered by the program. The skills learned in this program help students obtain employment in the Massachusetts service industry. Ben Hires, CEO of the BCNC, joined a tour of the facilities and answered questions on the BCNC's impact on the local community. Commissioners sat in on a *CustomerFIRST* class to get firsthand experience of the class.

After touring BCNC's facilities, the Commission visited IINE. There, they learned about the IINE's rich history as it approached its centennial of creating opportunities for refugees and immigrants through resettlement, education, career advancement, and pathways to citizenship. This visit included a conversation with IINE CEO Jeffery Thielman, who provided those on the tour with a first-hand account of the organization's work and its importance.

Following the tours, the MGC convened [Public Meeting #535](#). During the meeting, community members connected to CMF grant recipients spoke about their organization's work and how the CMF has allowed their impact to grow. The Commissioners heard from representatives from various organizations, including MassHire Metro North Workforce Board, BEST Hospitality, Action for Equity, BCNC, Community Work Services, IINE, La Colaborativa, New England Culinary Arts Training, Somerville Community Corporation, and the Greater Boston YMCA.

The Commissioners addressed local community leaders at the conclusion of the public meeting.



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“To see the work that has come out of these programs and the success that you have all had is empowering for us,” said Commissioner O’Brien. O’Brien also noted that being able to visit programs that have been impacted by a CMF and to see the work being done was energizing.

“If it weren’t for you, these participants’ futures might not be as bright,” said Commissioner Nakisha Skinner. “It’s a fantastic opportunity for us to hear the success, and to see the success behind the work that you do.”

“What we have to talk about is how we can make these dollars impact each other, and how can we combine together to make sure that people get the best use of these funds,” said Interim Chair Jordan Maynard. “What I heard today is ‘synergies’ and that’s exactly right. That’s what we’re trying to do at the Massachusetts Gaming Commission, and that’s what the legislature intended to do with this fund.”

“These are competitive grants and the [MGC’s Community Affairs division] put in a lot of hours to recommend who should receive them,” said Commissioner Hill. “When the legislature voted [to legalize casino gaming] programs like this is exactly where we thought these funds should be going.”



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