



2023 Denver Municipal Race Questionnaire

Thank you so much for taking our survey! We are excited to learn more about how you plan to address some of the issues that matter most to our immigrant community in Denver. This survey is meant to provide some background information on critical issues in Denver, please feel free to reach out to our team after you have completed the survey if you have additional questions on any of the topics discussed.

We also want to prioritize voter education and plan to publish answers publicly afterwards. We will be reaching out to all candidates in the Denver Mayoral race with the opportunity to respond. We do not plan to endorse any candidate in the Denver Mayoral race but hope this survey serves as a way for our constituents to differentiate between candidates.

This survey includes values based “yes or no” statement questions as well as qualitative open ended questions. We encourage you to add as much detail to your open ended answers as you can.

Candidate Background Information

Tell us more about your campaign.

1. Candidate name:

Deborah “Debbie” Ortega

2. What is the candidate's party affiliation, regardless of whether the race is partisan or non-partisan?

Democrat

3. Who should we contact if we have questions? (i.e. name of campaign manager, if applicable)

Rachel Feinberg
rachel@debbieortega.com

4. What is the best email to contact the campaign/candidate?

dortega@debbieortega.com

5. What is the best phone number to contact the campaign/candidate?

(720) 722-0941

6. Campaign social media handles listed by platform

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ortegaforddenver>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/Ortega4Mayor>

Instagram: @ortega4mayor

LinkedIn: [linkedin.com/in/debbie-ortega-a3720714/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/debbie-ortega-a3720714/)

7. Campaign website

debbieortega.com

8. Why is the candidate running for office (e.g. platform)?

As the daughter of a coal miner killed on the job, then raised by a single mother, my values are driven by the belief that working people deserve a seat at the table, a voice in their future, and a city where they can live, work, and thrive.

Denver needs to chart a new course: community safety concerns and hate crimes have drastically accelerated since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Marginalized and disenfranchised communities have been most severely impacted by the effects of climate change, and the affordable housing crisis has made living and working in Denver unattainable for far too many.

Denver deserves a mayor with a proven track record of serving the people, standing up to special interests, and being an independent voice. I have implemented effective community safety measures, bold environmental justice initiatives, historic human rights achievements, advocated for reproductive rights, and programs to alleviate the challenges associated with homelessness and housing affordability. The work I have done for working people and traditionally marginalized communities goes back decades. The work I will do as mayor starts with passing legislation that will enable people to live safe, dignified, and healthy lives.

I am the only candidate in this race who has four decades of experience in public service, and I am running to make sure that Denver can be a safe, prosperous, and affordable city for all.

On the Issues

Tell us more about your values and how you would tackle major issues impacting the immigrant community in Denver.

10. In 2017, Community leaders in Denver pushed council to pass an ordinance to limit police collaboration with ICE and create the Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund (DILSF) to support community members through immigration legal proceedings.¹ Since the program launched in 2018, local nonprofit legal service providers have received a total of more than

¹ <https://denverite.com/2017/08/31/heres-else-denver-will-help-immigrants-risk-deportation/>

\$1.5M in funds to provide Denver residents with direct legal representation and affirmative relief services including support with DACA renewals and citizenship applications.² Denver residents served by this fund - who on average have called Denver home for 17 years - have been able to stay with their families and in their communities thanks to the support provided!

While the fund has been critical to expanding legal services for hundreds of Denver residents, many continue to go through immigration proceedings without representation due to gaps in available resources.

a. Are you in support of Denver's Immigrant Legal Defense Fund?

Yes

b. What will you do to continue expanding the Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund (DILSF) to ensure Denver residents have access to counsel in immigration proceedings?

On top of the existing work being done with Denver's Immigrant Legal Defense Fund, I would work closely with the Denver Office of Immigrant & Refugee Affairs (DOIRA) to see where the city, nonprofits, and other organizations can best support New Americans looking to call Denver home.

11. The 2017 ordinance also sought to tackle long standing issues for the immigrant community regarding police collaborating with ICE and federal immigration officials. The passage of the ordinance made strides to protect Denver residents from federal overreach by prohibiting Denver city employees from asking about immigration status or sharing that information with federal agents and prohibiting Denver law enforcement from holding individuals beyond their release date for ICE.³

While this change marked a powerful shift in Denver standing up for the equal rights of all residents, there are still some key practices Denver's Sheriff Department engages in that contribute to the separation of our immigrant families. The Denver Sheriff's Department continues to inform ICE proactively when undocumented Denver residents are being released from custody. This practice of notifying ICE of individual release leads directly to the incarceration of undocumented Denverites and separation of Denver families through deportation.

a. Do you support ending the practice of 'ICE notifications' in Denver?

² <https://denverfoundation.org/denver-immigrant-legal-services-fund/>

³ <https://denverite.com/2017/08/28/ice-cooperation-bill/>

Yes. I would make exceptions for those being held for serious crimes, and also check with my City Attorney on any ramifications from the Federal Government by not complying with release notifications.

b. What additional measures would you propose to limit police collaboration with ICE in Denver?

I was a proud supporter of CB17-0940 (Public Safety Enforcement Priorities Act) due its intent to create a safer, more welcoming, and trusting environment for New Americans and law enforcement.

In furthering this goal under my leadership as mayor, I'd need to see specific legislation prior to outlining additional measures at this point.

12. Our groundbreaking report titled, **“Sabotaging Sanctuary: How Data Brokers give ICE access to Colorado’s Data and Jails,”**⁴ shows how ICE contracted with the data broker company Appriss Solutions, a subsidiary of LexisNexis, to receive jail-booking data from a Colorado jail alert system (VINE). The system alerts ICE agents immediately when anyone on the agency’s target lists is booked into county jails, allowing ICE to arrest them upon release. By contracting with 3rd party data brokers ICE can obtain information on hundreds of millions of people across the country.

Further, our report also shows that Denver’s ongoing contract with LexisNexis permits information sharing with other LexisNexis customers, including ICE.

a. Do you support efforts to limit expansive surveillance by third party entities and law enforcement/ICE?

Yes

b. What steps would you take to address this issue in Denver?

I would need to see specifics accompanying legislation prior to outlining concrete steps, however, I would look to partner with the City Attorney’s Office to see if any current or upcoming state or local laws are being broken with this current process in the city.

13. When Mayor Hancock signed the 2017 ordinance he stated the administration’s goal of “affirm[ing] Denver’s commitment to stand with immigrants and refugees” and “maintain Denver as a welcoming city where everyone can feel safe and thrive.”⁵ Over

⁴ https://notechforice.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Sabotaging-Sanctuary_Final-Report_Design_4.pdf?link_id=2&can_id=c3f37b433cea47238c8ae84f743f8f72&source=email-new-report-shows-ice-uses-data-brokers-to-skirt-sanctuary-laws&email_referrer=&email_subject=new-report-shows-ice-uses-data-brokers-to-skirt-sanctuary-laws

the past months migrants have been coming to Denver and the city has mobilized staff, shelter, and support to help people find security and stability.

a. Do you support Denver's efforts to support newly arrived people?

Yes

b. How do you think the city has done with the current plan to support newly arrived immigrants?

There is clearly more work to be done to create a safer, more welcoming, and efficient immigration process that leads to more pathways towards citizenship.

However, it was extremely encouraging to see the coordination of businesses, nonprofits, and our public sector to provide newly arrived immigrants with shelter, food, and other essentials upon their arrival.

c. What would you do as Mayor to support newly arrived people?

While the city has done good work in supporting newly arrived people, we need to be more proactive. This is where I see DOIRA and the Denver Immigrant and Refugee Commission being major partners with my administration, and with an incoming City Council.

Under my leadership, both agencies would raise more awareness about resources and services that will help connect New Americans with essential services like housing, employment opportunities, education, and more.

Additionally, I will seek ongoing federal funding to offset the costs incurred by the City for its work to support New Americans.

We are facing critical staffing shortages across all industries and it is imperative that we support New Americans in obtaining documentation and connecting them with training and employment services, to help them achieve self-sustainability.

14. H.R. 8433, introduced by Congressman Lofgren and Senator Padilla, revises the Renewing Immigration Provisions of the Immigration Act of 1929. The act allows the Secretary of Homeland Security to grant lawful permanent resident status to individuals who have been in the US since the registry date - which is currently January 1, 1972. Historically updates to the registry date have had bipartisan support with the last update happening under the Reagan Administration in 1986. This bill updates the date and changes it to a rolling cutoff so that an individual may qualify for lawful permanent resident status if they have been in the U.S. for at least seven years. This would benefit millions of undocumented Americans who currently have no path to citizenship, including DACA and TPS recipients and their family members, farm workers, and essential workers.

a. Would you support a rolling update to the US Registry Act?

Yes

b. Do you support a pathway to citizenship for all 11 million undocumented people?

Yes

15. Though the timeline is not clear yet, we expect the 5th circuit to rule negatively on DACA, possibly ending the program in its entirety. With a split Congress, we are doubtful that a federal solution will come in time to aid the 11 million undocumented people who have built lives here in the US.

a. Do you believe leaders in Denver have a role to play to support DACA recipients in the wake of a negative supreme court decision?

Yes

b. Within your elected role in Denver, what *specific* actions would you take to support the community in the wake of a negative DACA decision?



I would convene a task force of all stakeholders to determine the best course of action.

With this in mind, I'd continue working to mobilize the public, private, and nonprofit sectors to secure more funding for the Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund to support the immigrant community, and our city more broadly. Additionally, I'd leverage the bully pulpit of the mayor to advocate for more comprehensive immigration reform at the federal level.

16. As an immigrant rights coalition, our members have identified access to affordable and dignified housing as a top priority.

a. If elected, what are you willing to do to expand access to affordable housing and to support Denver's immigrant community and workforce to meet their housing needs?

Our city's vibrancy, ability to attract new residents and businesses, and economic vitality depends on the ability of working people to afford to live here. To address the crisis of unaffordable housing, a comprehensive approach is required, including job connection, public transportation, childcare, and much more.

The EHA program created by City Council begins to address this by expediting permits for affordable units, but more work is required to fix Denver's broken

permitting process so that affordable housing can be brought online more efficiently.

Additionally, we need to invest more strategically in alternative housing, including single room occupancy (SRO) units, co-housing modular homes, repurposing vacant units and/or commercial buildings, and ADUs. We should also identify vacant public lands for manufactured housing at 40% cheaper than on-site new construction. Solving our housing needs also requires regional solutions and partnership with non-profit housing developers.

- b. Immigrants have also identified cost of housing as a key issue impacting mental health, financial stability, and the overall wellbeing of our communities. With housing costs and costs of living far surpassing raises in wages, **do you support local control on rent stabilization if the state repealed the ban on rent stabilization?****

Yes, with restrictions. In the early 2000's, I co-chaired Denver's Housing Task Force that led to our first Inclusionary Housing Ordinance which required developers to include affordable for sale units.

17. Denver recently announced plans to wind down the federally funded Emergency Rental Assistance Program due to limited federal funding.⁵ With a budget of over \$130 million, this program helped around 14,000 Denver families stay housed and avoided displacement by offering to cover rent and utility debts. Cost of living in Denver remains inaccessibly high for too many working class Denverites and evictions are steadily climbing.

- a. Would you support Denver reinvesting in the program to provide rental assistance at similar levels to Denver residents?**

Yes

Connection to Community

Tell us more about the communities you work most closely with.

18. What grassroots leaders and organizations are supporting your campaign? Who are you accountable to?

El Semanario
UniteHERE Local 23
Metro Housing Coalition
Colorado Professional Fire Fighters
Denver Fire Fighters Local 858
UFCW Local 7
Polly Baca, Former State Senator
Lucia Guzman, Former State Senator and Former Democratic Leader of the Colorado State Senate

⁵ <https://denverite.com/2022/12/02/denver-emergency-rental-assistance-application-deadline/>

Joan Fitz-Gerald, Former President of the Colorado State Senate
Mannie Rodriguez, DNC Committeeman and Chair of CDLI
Susan Lontine, Former State Representative
Irene Aguilar, Former State Senator
Paula Sandoval, Former State Senator and Former Denver City Councilmember
Mike Cerbo, Former State Representative
Ramona Martinez, Former Denver City Councilmember
Val Flores, Former Colorado State Board of Education Director
Angie Rivera-Malpiede, Vice President of the Foundation of Urban Sustainable
Communities, Executive Director Northeast Transportation Connections, Former RTD
Board Chair, Former RTD Director - District C
Tim Sandos, Former Denver City Councilmember
Jeannie Kaplan, Former DPS Board Director
John Simonet, Former Police Chief
Ed Thomas, Former Denver City Council Member and Former Police Officer Mimi
Loung, AAPI Community Leader, Owner of Truong An Gifts and Far East Center
Reverend Fidel "Butch" Montoya, Latino Faith Initiative
Tamara Boynton, Community Faith Leader
Christine Alonzo, Community Organizer
Ari Zavaras- Former Manager of Public Safety and Former Police Chief
Vernon L. Hill
Joe Wood
Amy Wood
Dr. Aubrey Lavizzo
Rick Reynolds
Blake Angelo
Bob Dorschimer
Bob Bruce
Corinne Rodriguez
Dave Stalls
Eric Tade
Evan Marchand
Frank Sullivan
Gene Lucero
Dr. Luis Torres
George Balafas
Greg Park
Ian Choudri
Jose Silva
Leslie Fangman
Nicole Aviles
Rachel Feinberg
Rex Brown
Steve Kaplan
Susan Aldretti
Sylvia Sullivan
Virginia Castro

Willie Shepherd
Yianni Bellis

19. What does co-governance mean to you? How do you hope to serve in partnership with the community as an elected official?

Co-governance is a principle I've tried to strive towards my entire career. To me, co-governance means working shoulder-to-shoulder with the community to produce real results that improve the lives of the members of your community.

For example, when I helped pass *A Livable Wage for Denver* and the *Public Safety Enforcement Priorities Act*, these were only able to pass because of the partnership fostered between individuals, advocacy organizations, and City Hall.

As mayor, co-governance would continue to guide my actions, and most acutely when advocating for the rights of immigrants, this could start with meeting more frequently with the Denver Office of Immigrant & Refugee Affairs (DOIRA), immigrants, and refugees.