

# LICENSE TO FREEDOM



April 17th, 2023

Dear J.M. Kaplan Fund grantors:

I strongly support the Innovation grant proposal from East County Media to create a Social Justice News & Resource Center at [www.EastCountyMagazine.org](http://www.EastCountyMagazine.org). This would include webinars, podcasts, interviews, and a resource center for social justice resources to help immigrants and refugees in our region, with a site redesign to highlight the new center and resources, also helping connect groups to better coordinate assistance for these vulnerable populations.

I came to the U.S. as a refugee from Iraq and the Executive Director of License to Freedom, working to empower local refugees and immigrants to overcome barriers that limit their success and to build peaceful, loving and safe relationships within our diverse immigrant and refugee populations in the San Diego Region. San Diego County took in nearly 3,000 refugees last year. We have the highest number of Iraq War refugees and second highest number of Afghan refugees in the U.S.. We also have immigrants and asylum seekers from many other places, due to our proximity on the U.S.-Mexico border and San Diego's history as a welcoming place for new Americans. But resources are now stretched thin and more help is needed.

The needs of the people we serve are vast. Refugees receive very limited resources. They have survived, war, torture, loss of family members and other trauma. Yet many face trauma and stress here, struggling to find good jobs and educational opportunities to support themselves and their families.

Miriam Raftery, the Editor of East County Magazine and Executive Director of East County Media, has interviewed me several times on the changing needs of refugees and immigrants in our region. She is a caring person as well as a talented journalism who has won many awards, and has a talented team of reporters working with her.

There is a real need for a centralized news center and online resource center for refugees, immigrants, and groups serving them, as well as for members of the public who wish to help these newcomers to America. As a former refugee now serving the refugee and immigrant communities, I understand the importance of access to resources, networking with other organizations and community leaders in these fields, and getting timely news stories out to educate the public and elected officials in our region on the needs and accomplishments of those in our refugee and immigrant communities. Please fund this grant to make the Social Justice News & Resource Center for our region become a reality.

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[www.licensetofreedom.org](http://www.licensetofreedom.org)

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Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the initials 'DA' with a stylized flourish.

Dilkhwaz Ahmed, Executive Director  
License to Freedom