

Commission on Immigrant and Refugee Affairs Application



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| Submitted on | 7 February 2025, 12:33AM |
| Receipt number | 63 |
| Related form version | 10 |

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| I am interested in serving on the Commission on Immigrant and Refugee Affairs. By checking this box I am affirming that I understand this appointment will be a 2-3 year commitment. | Yes, I understand |
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| I understand that this document will be a public record and any information I provide could be subject to release upon request. | Yes, I understand |
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| Date of application | 02/06/2025 |
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Contact Information

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| Full name | Bartholomew T. Shepkong |
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| Phonetic pronunciation | Bar-THAW-luh-myoo SHEP-kong |
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| Gender | Male |
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| Pronouns | HE/HIM |
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| Email address | bshepkong@gmail.com |
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| Phone number | 773-677-4303 |
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| Indicate home, work, mobile for primary number | Mobile |
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| Secondary phone number | |
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| Indicate home, work, mobile for secondary number | |
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| If you have a social media presence (Instagram, Facebook, X, Tiktok, LinkedIn, etc.) please share the best way to find you | https://www.linkedin.com/in/bartholomew-shepkong |
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| Residential street address | 2390 Dover Road |
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| City | Columbus |
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| Zip code | 43209 |
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| How many years have you lived in the City of Columbus? | 10 |
| What district of the City of Columbus do you live in? (1-9 or outside of city limits) | District 8 |
| Age | 46-55 |

Personal Information

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| Country of origin (or country of origin of your parents, if applicable) | Nigeria |
| How long have you lived in the US? (date of arrival) | 08/21/2003 |
| What immigrant group or groups do you represent? | African |
| What languages do you speak and rate your fluency in each (basic, conversational, fluent, or proficient) | English, Hausa. |
| Do you identify as one of the following: Immigrant (a person who has come to a country that is not their own in order to live there permanently), Refugee (a person who has come to a country that is not their own to avoid persecution in their country of origin), First-Generation (children of foreign-born parents) | Yes |
| Ethnicity and race (please check all that apply) | African American (of African Descent) Black (Caribbean, South American, African, etc.) |
| Occupation (if retired, please share former occupation) | SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR |
| Do you identify with any of the following affinity groups? | |

Questionnaire

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| Why are you interested in serving on this commission? (maximum 250 words) | <p>As a scholar and practitioner in Public Policy and Social Change, I am deeply committed to advancing policies that foster social equity, economic inclusion, and immigrant integration. My interest in serving on the City of Columbus Immigrant and Refugee Commission is driven by a profound understanding of the challenges faced by immigrant and refugee communities and a strong belief in the power of policy to create transformative change.</p> <p>Columbus is home to a diverse and vibrant immigrant population, and ensuring that policies reflect the needs and aspirations of these communities is essential for fostering an inclusive and thriving city. My Ph.D. in Public Policy and Social Change has equipped me with the analytical tools and policy frameworks necessary to evaluate and advocate for evidence-based, community-centered solutions.</p> <p>Additionally, my leadership roles—including as CEO of the Ohio African Chamber of Commerce and National President of the Plateau State Association USA—have provided me with firsthand experience in addressing economic, social, and cultural challenges that affect immigrants and refugees.</p> <p>Through my work in economic empowerment, workforce development, and diaspora engagement, I have cultivated strong relationships with community leaders, businesses, and policy stakeholders. Serving on this commission would allow me to apply my expertise in public policy, social</p> |
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justice, and institutional collaboration to shape initiatives that promote:

- Economic Mobility – Advocating for policies that support immigrant entrepreneurs, job access, and business development.
- Civic and Social Integration – Strengthening pathways for community participation, leadership, and representation.
- Data-Driven Policy Advocacy – Utilizing research and community engagement to inform equitable policies and resource allocation.
- Cultural Competency and Institutional Change – Enhancing public institutions' ability to serve and empower diverse populations.

I believe that my academic background, leadership experience, and deep commitment to social change make me a valuable asset to this commission. I am eager to contribute my knowledge and passion to ensure that Columbus remains a city where immigrants and refugees not only settle but thrive.

I welcome the opportunity to serve and collaborate with fellow commissioners, policymakers, and community advocates to advance a more inclusive and prosperous Columbus for all.

What do you hope the commission will accomplish in the short term and long term? (maximum 250 words)

In the short term, I envision the commission as a policy incubator—conducting data-driven assessments to identify systemic barriers, enhancing civic engagement, and fostering economic inclusion through targeted workforce and entrepreneurial initiatives. Strengthening institutional partnerships and promoting cultural competency within public services will be crucial in laying the groundwork for sustainable change.

Long-term, the commission should institutionalize pro-immigrant policies, establish a dedicated resource center, and drive inclusive economic development by ensuring equitable access to capital, licensing, and procurement opportunities. By embedding immigrant leadership pipelines within governance structures, Columbus can emerge as a national model for integration, where diversity is not just recognized but leveraged for economic and social innovation.

Please describe and share relevant activities and accomplishments that relate to the community that you represent (maximum 250 words)

My commitment to immigrant and refugee advocacy is grounded in policy analysis, economic development, and cultural sustainability. As CEO of the Ohio African Chamber of Commerce, I have designed and led initiatives that strengthen immigrant entrepreneurship, enhance capital accessibility, and influence economic policies that drive sustainable inclusion. My approach integrates market-driven strategies with policy interventions, ensuring that immigrant-owned businesses are positioned as key contributors to Columbus's economic ecosystem.

As National President of the Plateau State Association USA, I have mobilized transnational networks to facilitate diaspora-led development, investment initiatives, and civic participation. By leveraging global partnerships, I have advanced bilateral economic opportunities that bridge Columbus with international markets, reinforcing the city's role as an economic and cultural nexus.

In my capacity as Chairman of the Board for the Columbus African Festival, I have championed the intersection of cultural diplomacy and economic empowerment. The festival functions not only as a cultural preservation initiative but also as a strategic platform for economic participation, fostering public-private collaborations that elevate immigrant contributions in commerce, arts, and policy.

With a Ph.D. in Public Policy and Social Change, I employ empirical research and systems thinking to advocate for institutional reforms that dismantle structural barriers facing immigrant communities. Through policy engagement and cross-sector partnerships, I aim to influence the City of Columbus Immigrant and Refugee Commission toward a trajectory where inclusion is embedded in governance, economic structures are equitably accessible, and social cohesion is policy-driven rather than incidental.

List any experience that would assist you in serving on this commission (maximum 250 words)

My academic, professional, and leadership experiences have equipped me with the policy expertise, economic development acumen, and community engagement skills necessary to serve effectively on the City of Columbus Immigrant and Refugee Commission.

As CEO of the Ohio African Chamber of Commerce, I have worked extensively on economic inclusion initiatives, small business advocacy, and policy recommendations that promote immigrant entrepreneurship and workforce integration. My experience in collaborating with policymakers, business leaders, and community organizations has given me a deep understanding of the systemic challenges affecting immigrant economic mobility.

In my role as National President of the Plateau State Association USA, I have led diaspora-driven development efforts, cultural integration programs, and advocacy initiatives that strengthen the connection between immigrant communities and their host city. I have also been instrumental in fostering civic engagement and leadership development within African and other immigrant populations.

As Chairman of the Board for the Columbus African Festival, I have overseen large-scale cultural and economic events that serve as platforms for cross-cultural exchange, policy engagement, and business networking. This experience has honed my ability to coordinate multi-stakeholder initiatives, manage public-private partnerships, and elevate immigrant voices in citywide discussions.

With a Ph.D. in Public Policy and Social Change, I bring a research-driven, equity-focused approach to policymaking. My expertise in policy analysis, social justice, and institutional change will support the commission's mission to advance immigrant integration, economic opportunity, and policy reform in Columbus.

Are you related to any elected City official or city staff member? If yes, please explain.

NO

Do you or any of your family members work for or serve on the board of directors of any organization which has contracted with or applied for funding from the City of Columbus? Do you anticipate any involvement of this kind in the future? If yes, please describe the relationship.

NO

Please indicate any activities you are involved with that may present a conflict of interest with the commission applying for.

N/A

References

Reference #1

Mr. Alfred Akainyah

Relation #1

Mentor

Phone number #1

614-286-8122

Email #1

aaakainyah@columbus.gov

Reference #2

Dr. Cecilia Mengo

Relation #2

Professional Colleague

Phone number #2

214-643-9170

Email #2

cecymengo@gmail.com

By filling out the reference section, I hereby authorize the City of Columbus to conduct a reference check by contacting the individuals listed above. As a reminder, this document is subject to public records requests.

Yes

Resume & Letters of Reference

Optional: Please attach your resume and any letters of reference here. If you plan on mailing this form please remember to attach a copy of your resume and any letters of reference.