

## **Immigrant Heroes of the COVID-19 Crisis Honored**

MALDEN, Mass, April 7, 2021/ Three Massachusetts residents were honored last night, Tuesday, April 6, 2021, at The Immigrant Learning Center Immigrant Heroes Award Benefit. The event paid tribute to the tremendous achievements of three honorees and to the 1.2 million immigrant essential workers in Massachusetts without whom the COVID-19 pandemic would have been much worse. Honorees Abdulkader Hayani, Monique Nguyen and Niall Lennon were given their awards at a socially distanced ceremony held at the Royal Sonesta Boston in Cambridge and broadcast online to a nationwide audience.

In a pre-recorded message, Senator Edward J. Markey said to immigrant essential workers everywhere, “You have stepped up during the COVID-19 pandemic and done the critical but often very difficult work that had to be done, whether that was in a hospital saving lives, in virtual classrooms teaching our children, or in a grocery store keeping food on the shelves.” Senator Elizabeth Warren agreed in her pre-recorded message, saying, “They teach in our schools, work in our restaurants and hospitals, discover groundbreaking cures. Immigrants make our country stronger, and our communities are better and brighter because of the invaluable contributions of immigrants.”

Abdulkader Hayani, a refugee from Syria, was honored for providing masks when they were urgently needed. When the pandemic hit in early 2020, he was laid off from his job as a tailor and turned his full attention to making and donating masks. In conjunction with the Shapiro Foundation, he was able to produce and distribute more than 2,000 masks in 22 states early in the pandemic when masks were in limited supply. A humble man, this accomplishment is something Hayani calls, “just something very small to help the American people.”

Monique Nguyen was born in Canada to parents from Vietnam and moved with her family to the United States as a child. As the executive director of the Matahari Women Workers' Center in Boston, Nguyen created the MassUndocuFund last year with Mass Jobs with Justice and One Fair Wage to assist undocumented immigrants who lost employment or wages due to the pandemic. According to the organization, there are an estimated 250,000 undocumented immigrants who live and work in Massachusetts and contribute about \$184.6 million in state and local taxes. Because of their immigration status, none of these residents are eligible for federal stimulus funds or state unemployment benefits. MassUndocuFund has raised \$1.5 million and distributed grants to workers in the restaurant industry, agriculture, construction, domestic workers and more in all 14 counties in Massachusetts.

A native of Ireland, Niall Lennon is a senior director at the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard and a critical member of the team that, in conjunction with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, has made more than 15 million COVID-19 tests possible and counting. Starting with the first test in March 2020 through the current processing of 120,000 tests each day, Lennon has spearheaded clinical validation and been a primary liaison with the Food and Drug Administration as well as partners such as the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke. Residents in COVID hotspots, nursing homes, long-term care facilities, hospitals,

homeless shelters, and low-income housing complexes, as well as students in 140 public and private colleges and universities throughout the Northeast and K-12 schools across Massachusetts, have benefited from these efforts.

A recording of the award ceremony as well as resources about immigrant essential workers in Massachusetts and the United States can be found on The Immigrant Learning Center's website at [www.ilctr.org](http://www.ilctr.org).

Other elected officials who contributed messages of thanks and congratulations included Congresswoman Katherine Clark, Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey, Massachusetts Secretary of Housing and Economic Development Mike Kennealy, Massachusetts Senator Jason Lewis and Revere Mayor Brian M. Arrigo. Business and community leaders also showed their support through pre-recorded messages, including Massachusetts Competitive Partnership President and CEO Jay Ash, Boston Business Journal Executive Editor Doug Banks, Deshpande Foundation Founder Desh Deshpande, and New England Patriots Foundation President Josh Kraft.

### **About The Immigrant Learning Center, Inc.**

The Immigrant Learning Center, Inc. of Malden, MA, is a not-for-profit organization that gives immigrants a voice in three ways. The English Language Program provides free, year-round English classes to immigrant and refugee adults in Greater Boston to help them become successful workers, parents and community members. The Public Education Institute informs Americans about the economic and social contributions of immigrants in our society, and the Institute for Immigration Research, a joint venture with George Mason University, conducts research on the economic contributions of immigrants. For more information, visit the website <http://www.ilctr.org>. The ILC can also be found on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube and Pinterest.

Photo Caption: (Left to right) Monique Nguyen, Abdulkader Hayani, Niall Lennon

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