

## Executive Summary – Office of New Americans Advisory Board 2020 Report

In 2020, the General Assembly passed bills HB 1209 and SB 991 establishing the Office of New Americans (ONA) within the Department of Social Services and the Office of New Americans Advisory Board (ONAAB), within the meaning of § 2.2-2100, in the executive branch of government. The purpose of the 18 member Board is to advise the Governor, cabinet members, and the General Assembly on strategies to improve state policies and programs to support the economic, linguistic, and civic integration of new Americans throughout the Commonwealth.

The enabling legislation requires the Board to report annually, by December 1, to the Governor and the General Assembly on the activities of the Office of New Americans and provide recommendations for improving state policies and programs to support the economic, linguistic, and civic integration of new Americans throughout the Commonwealth. The chairman of the Board shall submit to the Governor and the General Assembly an annual executive summary of the interim activity and work of the Board no later than the first day of each regular session of the General Assembly.

The Department of Social Services began the work of the ONA in July 2020 by expanding the scope of the Office of Newcomer Services within the Department of Social Services to include both immigrant and refugee services. The initial focus was to establish an internal infrastructure, connect with local, state and national partners and explore economic, linguistic and integration needs across the Commonwealth. Accomplishments of the ONA include the following:

- Collaborated with the Commonwealth's Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer's Office to secure a Senior Policy Fellowship. The Senior Policy position will work in collaboration with the Department of Social Services the Board across secretariats, state agencies, and relevant communities to coordinate interagency efforts to identify and remove systemic barriers preventing immigrants and refugees from fully participating in Virginia's workforce, educational systems, economy, and across other relevant sectors.
- Conducted several focus groups with Virginia immigrant stakeholders to identify unmet needs for immigrants and to develop an initial list of workforce barriers and opportunities. Included in the workforce challenges are: financial and transportation obstacles, need for English proficiency, time and prerequisites for further education, competition, scam certifications, disappointments when restarting a career, employers' unfamiliarity with foreign credentials and immigration status challenges.
- In conjunction with the World Education Services, National Governor's Association, National Conference of State Legislatures, and Council of State Governments, the Department of Social Services and Department of Health Professions are participating in an Internationally Trained Barrier Reduction Workgroup that is exploring licensing barriers that impact immigrants and refugees.
- Began conversations to address additional language access and 2-1-1 VIRGINIA.
- Developed resource lists and posted on the agency's website, which will be the beginning of a clearinghouse of information for immigration. Information such as immigrant data, list of service providers, health and mental health resources will provide a comp

The appointments to the ONAAB were announced on October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020. The inaugural board appointees are:

- **Hassan Ahmad** of Sterling, Immigration Lawyer, The HMA Law Firm
- **Kate Ayers** of Henrico, Executive Director, ReEstablish Richmond
- **Rammy G. Barbari** of Falls Church, Attorney, Price Benowitz LLP
- **Amar Bhattarai** of Roanoke, Non-Profit Professional and Small Business Owner
- **Hannah “Mel” Borja** of Richmond, Immigration Caseworker, Office of U.S. Senator Tim Kaine
- **Jennifer A. Crewalk** of Reston, Higher Education Professional, Georgetown University
- **Dr. Fern Hauck** of Earlysville, Professor of Family Medicine, University of Virginia
- **Michael Hoefler** of Alexandria, Retired Chief, Office of Performance and Quality, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
- **Susannah Lepley** of Rockingham County, Virginia Director of Immigration and Refugee Resettlement, Church World Service
- **Eric Lin** of Chesterfield, Principal, The VIE Group
- **Dora Muhammad** of Prince William County, Congregation Engagement Director, Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy
- **El Hadji Djibril Niang** of Chesterfield, President, African Community Network
- **Ahoo Salem** of Roanoke, Executive Director, Blue Ridge Literacy
- **Juan Santacoloma** of North Chesterfield, Community Engagement Coordinator for Multicultural Services, Chesterfield County
- **Amelia Castañeda Smith** of Henrico, Welcome Center and Family Advocacy Coordinator, Richmond Public Schools
- **Eva P. Stitt, PhD** of Hampton
- **Dr. Milton Vickerman** of Albemarle County, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Virginia
- **So Young Yoon** of Manassas Park, Community Services Coordinator, NAKASEC VA

The Board held its first meeting on January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021 and submitted no report for 2020. The second meeting of the ONAAB will be held on April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021 where officers shall be elected. There are no additional activities to report as of the commencement of the 2021 General Assembly session.

Submitted by Eric Lin, Chair Office of New Americans Advisory Board