



Commonwealth of Virginia

Office of Governor Glenn A. Youngkin



***New Americans are valuable contributors to the Commonwealth
and are worth competing for.***

Annual Report 2023-2024

October 9th, 2024

To: Glenn A. Youngkin, Governor
Honorable General Assembly Members

From: Andrei Lipan, Chair
Office of New Americans Advisory Board

Andrei Lipan



VIRGINIA
OFFICE OF
NEW AMERICANS
ADVISORY
BOARD

The Office of New Americans Advisory Board (the Board) was created in 2020 under §2.2-2496 and established as an advisory board, within the meaning of § 2.2-2100, in the executive branch of state government. The purpose of the 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.

As part of this duty, the Chair of the Board is required to report 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.

New Americans are essential to the economic success of the United States. A 2023 report from the American Immigration Council found that 44.8% of Fortune 500 companies were founded by immigrants or their children. The report goes on to state that:

“These New American Fortune 500 companies collectively generated a staggering \$8.1 trillion in revenue during fiscal year 2022, surpassing the GDP of several developed nations. Their significant contributions extend beyond revenue, as they employ over 14.8 million people, emphasizing their role as a crucial driver of job creation and economic prosperity¹.”

There is no doubt that New Americans are valuable assets to the Commonwealth. We are competing with other states to realize the full economic and social potential of New Americans. As new corporate investments and business activity in the Commonwealth grows, the opportunities to leverage the growing New American population are plentiful. It is imperative that we better engage the New American population in the Commonwealth to address these labor and economic opportunities.

Virginia must create policies and build systems that allow for the economic integration of New American Communities. ***New Americans are valuable contributors to the Commonwealth and are worth competing for.***

Additionally, global events continue to remind us that Virginia is an international destination, refuge, and place for new beginnings. Not only has the Commonwealth provided refuge and succor for Afghan and Ukrainian refugees, but it has also attracted worldwide talent to its schools and leading companies.

Investments in talent acquisition and retention should be at the forefront of our immigrant integration initiatives. These investments will produce returns in workforce development, economic opportunity and potentially business attraction and even more foreign investment in the Commonwealth or opening pathways to new markets overseas.

¹ American Immigration Council, [New Report Reveals Immigrant Roots of Fortune 500 Companies](#)
2023-2024 Office of New Americans Advisory Board Report - October 2024

The Commonwealth has an opportunity to embrace these communities as we recognize that these New Americans will enhance our workforce, create jobs, and provide a more competitive edge in the global marketplace.

Over the past year, we have experienced many changes to the board which influenced our ability to provide substantially different recommendations. Thus, you will notice some recurring inputs from previous reports. However, we believe that those recurring inputs continue to be timely and pertinent to the New American population. Below are several recommendations that we feel will help strengthen immigrant integration in the Commonwealth, economically empower New Americans and their surrounding communities, and support a robust Office of New Americans. We look forward to engaging further to establish more comprehensive connections to these communities, develop effective support that is accessible and aligns the localities, state, and Federal resources to create a more Welcoming Commonwealth - ***A Commonwealth in which new and aspiring New Americans are recognized as valued contributors of the Commonwealth and are worth competing for.***

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of New Americans Advisory Board (as created in 2020 under §2.2-2496 and established as an advisory board, within the meaning of § 2.2-2100, in the executive branch of state government. The purpose of the 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 ONAAB is pleased to submit the fourth annual board report to the Honorable Glenn A. Youngkin and the Virginia General Assembly. Pursuant to §2.2-2498 of the Code of Virginia, this report serves as a summary of its activities, findings, and recommendations.

The ONAAB defines “New Americans” as: *New Americans refer to foreign-born persons residing in Virginia and their children, foreign and native born.* The foreign-born population in the Commonwealth is estimated to be 1.16 million individuals or roughly 13.3% of the total state population.² This fast-growing segment of Virginia’s overall population ranks as the 10th largest immigrant population in the nation.³

Two-thirds of all immigrants live in Northern Virginia, but sizable immigrant communities exist in Richmond, Roanoke, and other metropolitan areas throughout the Commonwealth. In fact, certain census tracts in Accomack, Rockingham and Lunenburg Counties have immigrant densities like many parts of Northern Virginia.

Additionally, Virginia is one of the top three recipients of Afghan refugees resettling in the United States. Virginia’s Office of New Americans have provided resettlement services to 19,046 Afghans during Federal Fiscal Years 2019-24 as of September 19, 2024.

ONAAB has adopted the following **Guiding Principles** that provide an overarching focus regarding the work of the board.

- **Recognizing our Value**
- **Ensuring Linguistic and Cultural Competencies**
- **Data Integrity**
- **Championing Representation**

The Board maintains a **committee structure** that is flexible but allows for deeper analysis of the far-ranging and multifaceted issues that New American communities face in Virginia.

- **Access to Services Committee** - This committee will focus on building awareness of the specific barriers that newcomers face in accessing services and resources.
- **Economic Opportunity Committee** - This Committee will explore the economic landscape and review what support is provided by the Commonwealth for workforce development and entrepreneurs.
- **Inter / Intra Governmental Affairs Committee** - This Committee will explore the interconnectivity of governmental policy and changes to those policies that impact New American communities in the Commonwealth.

The Board also has dedicated **Language Access** and **Data Integrity** leads in line with our Guiding Principles.

In the last year, ONAAB members listened to key stakeholders, learned how to engage with legislators and communicate with state agencies, and collaborated with other advisory boards. ONAAB leadership surveyed key stakeholders across the state to identify unmet needs. We worked with the Virginia Latino Advisory Board (VLAB)

² [U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2023, ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Table S0501](#)

³ Ibid.

and Virginia Asian Advisory Board (VAAB) to write a letter to the Governor about the importance of developing a statewide language access plan. To highlight the economic opportunities within New American populations, we have formed a committee with leaders from VLAB and VAAB to plan an international business symposium for spring of 2024. This work helped us form the following summary of recommendations.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

ACCESS TO SERVICES RECOMMENDATIONS

Executive Order

Prohibiting Honor Violence in the Commonwealth of Virginia

- Currently, no state or federal legislation exists in the United States making honor violence illegal. A 2018 study published by DOJ outlined honor violence as a persistent and continued issue across the United States. Among the issues identified in honor violence included: honor killings, honor-based domestic violence, forced marriage, and female genital mutilation. The Department of Justice specifically stated in their study that no current laws exist on honor violence in the United States.
- The proposed E.O. would build on already existing Virginia laws - child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) but also be able to stand on its own, since Honor Violence consists of multiple categories of abuses.
- Due to an increase in refugee and immigrant populations in Virginia, this law needs to take effect to also protect current and incoming children of immigrants and refugees (New Americans) who are resettling in Virginia.
- A harmful traditional practice (HTP) found to be prevalent in populations stemming from the Philippines, Latin America, Middle East/Northern Africa (MENA) and South Asia – especially Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, and Nepal.
- According to a study in Germany, families who assimilated did not experience issues of honor violence.

Education

Improve access to English language learning for refugees and immigrants in Virginia.

- Provide specific avenues for local literacy programs to gain access and utilize federal and state funding.
- Encourage public/private partnerships that could fund English classes and address barriers. For example, large employers of New Americans could partner with a literacy agency to provide onsite English for their employees.
- Dedicate one of the new Virginia Department of Education Lab schools⁴ to English Language Learning.
- Facilitate transition from ESOL programs to institutes of higher education by investing in Bridge Programs that address the English proficiency and college readiness needs of New Americans.
- Provide accessible information about associate and trade-based programs with a direct tie to the labor market and ensure high-demand courses are made known and open to diverse groups.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY RECOMMENDATIONS

New Americans Economic Forum

- Establishment of an economic forum targeted toward New Americans and their needs.
- Purpose is to set workforce development plans in place, create new programs aimed at increasing outreach to New Americans, and connect small and international businesses and various representatives from New American communities.

⁴ Virginia Department of Education, [Laboratory Schools Frequently Asked Questions](#)
2023-2024 Office of New Americans Advisory Board Report - October 2024

- Forum participants could include, but are not limited to state agencies, small businesses, international businesses, trade associations, non-profits, public and private colleges and universities.

Workforce Development

- Through Budgetary action, provide funding to the Office of New Americans and the Department of Labor to study employment and educational history of New Americans to determine focus of career pathway programs, and New American capacity to fill employment gaps in the state.
- Through Budgetary action, provide funding to the Office of New Americans, the Department of Labor, Virginia Economic Development Partnership, and the Department of Education to explore further opportunities to recruit New American talent and retain them through statewide employment initiatives.
- Through Budgetary action, provide funding to the Office of New Americans and the Department of Labor to review licensing and certification criteria and develop, translate, and disseminate career pathway maps.

INTER/INTRA GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS RECOMMENDATIONS

U.S. Citizenship Recommendations

- ONA should highlight the existing U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) Citizenship Resource Material on the ONA website and in any other related state agency websites or materials.
- ONA should explore working directly with the USCIS Office of Citizenship and Applicant Information Services to use their resources, and/or develop other resources specific to Virginia, to promote naturalization at community events, meetings, etc.
- Through Budgetary Action, provide funding to the Office of New Americans to develop programs that will promote naturalization, highlight, and utilize existing USCIS Office of Citizenship Resources and Application Services, and provide technical support to those applying for citizenship.

Language Access Recommendations

- The Office of New American Advisory Board recommends that the Virginia Governor empower the Office of Diversity, Opportunity and Inclusion to create and provide oversight of a statewide language access plan, in partnership with the Office of New Americans and the Office of New Americans Advisory Board, that would provide guidance and expectations for agency and department language access plans throughout the government of Virginia. The state language access plan would also include procurement policies and the review of the Code for provisions that would limit or restrain the implementation of a state language access plan. This would then be accompanied by legislative action for compliance provisions.
- The Office of New American Advisory Board recommends that adequate funding be provided to fully staff the Office of Diversity, Opportunity and Inclusion to oversee the compliance of agencies and departments within the state language access plan. The ODOI would also be tasked with the periodic review of state language access plan for compliance with federal guidelines and current best practices.

OFFICE OF NEW AMERICANS ADVISORY BOARD RECOMMENDATIONS

- Amend the Code to allow for more meetings per year.
- Amend the Code to raise the number of appointed non-legislative citizen Board members to twenty-one.
- Amend the Code to include additional ex-officio members on the Board.

OFFICE OF NEW AMERICAN ADVISORY BOARD RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE OFFICE OF NEW AMERICANS

- Commission a new JLARC study to assess the integration of New Americans in the Commonwealth and

- update the findings from the 2004 report.
- Enhance the Office of New Americans budget to address expanded and unmet needs.

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2023-2024 OFFICE OF NEW AMERICANS ADVISORY BOARD

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Andrei Lipan, Chair - *Chesterfield*

Michael Hoefler, Vice-Chair - *Alexandria*

COMMITTEE & FOCUS LEADERSHIP

Dr. Ahoo Salem, Lead, Ensuring Linguistic and Cultural Competencies Focus – *Roanoke*

Michael Hoefler, Lead, Data Integrity Focus – *Alexandria*

CURRENT MEMBERS

James Gordon, Access to Services Committee – *Halifax*

Michael Hoefler, Inter/Intra Governmental Affairs Committee - *Alexandria*

Panayiotis "Yoti" Jabri, Economic Opportunity Committee - *Prince George*

Andrei Lipan, Access to Services Committee - *Chesterfield*

Karina Lipsman, Inter/Intra Governmental Affairs Committee - *Alexandria*

Karina Martich, Economic Opportunity Committee - *Richmond*

Chris Mitchell, Inter/Intra Governmental Affairs Committee - *Grundy*

Cuong Nguyen, Access to Services Committee - *Richmond*

Elizabeth Njuguna, Access to Services Committee - *Ashburn*

Krishendeo Ramsingh, Economic Opportunity Committee - *Roanoke*

Juan Santacoloma, Inter/Intra Governmental Affairs Committee – *Chesterfield*

Eric-Michel Sossou-Gloh, Economic Opportunity Committee - *Alexandria*

Sasha Taylor, Access to Services Committee - *Alexandria*

Dr. Milton Vickerman, Data Equity Focus and Economic Opportunity Committee – *Charlottesville*

Zarmina Yusufi, Economic Opportunity Committee - *Fredericksburg*

FORMER MEMBERS

Hassan Ahmad - *Sterling*

Kate Ayers - *Henrico*

Amar Bhattarai - *Roanoke*

Rammy Barbari - *Falls Church*

Hannah "Mel" Borja - *Richmond*

Amelia Castaneda-Smith - *Richmond*

Dr. Jennifer Crewalk - *Reston*
Eric Lin - *Richmond*
Dr. Fern Hauck – *Earlysville*
Susannah Lepley – *Leesburg*
Dora Muhammad – *Triangle*
El Hadji Djibril Niang – *Richmond*
Aho0 Salem - *Roanoke*
Dr. Eva Stitt - *Norfolk*
Daniel Villar - *Henrico*
SoYoung Yoon – *Manassas Park*

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS

Martin D. Brown, Chief Diversity Officer, Office of Diversity, Opportunity, & Inclusion
Srilekha Palle, Chair, Virginia Asian Advisory Board
Rev. Cozy Bailey, Chair, Virginia African American Advisory Board
Joely Mauck, Chair, Council on Women
Astrid Gamez, Chair, Virginia Latino Advisory Board

ABOUT THE OFFICE OF NEW AMERICANS

The Office of New Americans was created under §63.2-209.1 in 2020 as an office within the Department of Social Services. The Office of New Americans incorporated the existing Office of Newcomer Services into a new office specifically to assist immigrant integration within the Commonwealth on an economic, social, and cultural level.

Under the authorizing code, the Office shall:

- 1. Implement a statewide strategy to promote the economic, linguistic, and civic integration of New Americans in the Commonwealth.*
- 2. Work with localities to coordinate and support local efforts that align with the statewide strategy to promote the economic, linguistic, and civic integration of New Americans in the Commonwealth;*
- 3. Provide advice and assistance to New Americans regarding (i) the citizenship application process and (ii) securing employment, housing, and services for which such persons may be eligible;*
- 4. Provide advice and assistance to state agencies regarding (i) the coordination of relevant policies across state agencies responsible for education, workforce, and training programs, including professional licensure guidance, small business development, worker protection, refugee resettlement, citizenship and voter education or engagement programs, housing programs, and other related programs, and (ii) the dissemination of information to localities and immigration service organizations regarding state programs that help New Americans find and secure employment, housing, and services for which they may be eligible;*
- 5. Educate localities and immigration service organizations on health epidemics and unlawful predatory actions, such as human trafficking, gang recruitment, and fraudulent financial and other schemes, to which communities of such persons may be especially vulnerable;*
- 6. Serve as the primary liaison with external stakeholders, particularly immigrant-serving and refugee serving organizations and businesses, on immigrant integration priorities and policies.*
- 7. Partner with state agencies and immigrant-serving and refugee-serving organizations and businesses to identify and disseminate beneficial immigrant integration policies and practices throughout the Commonwealth;*
- 8. Manage competitive grant programs that replicate beneficial practices or test new innovations that improve the effectiveness and efficacy of immigrant integration strategies; and*
- 9. Advise the Governor, cabinet members, and the General Assembly on strategies to improve state programs to support the economic, linguistic, and civic integration of New Americans throughout the Commonwealth.*

ABOUT THE OFFICE OF NEW AMERICANS ADVISORY BOARD

The Office of New Americans Advisory Board (the Board) was created in 2020 under §2.2-2496 and established as an advisory board, within the meaning of § 2.2-2100, in the executive branch of state government. The purpose of the 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.

Under the authorizing code, the Board shall have the following powers and duties:

- *Advise the Governor on ways to improve state policies and programs to support the economic, linguistic, and civic integration of New Americans throughout the Commonwealth;*
- *Undertake studies, symposiums, research, and factual reports to gather information to formulate and present recommendations to the Governor related to issues of concern and importance to New Americans in the Commonwealth;*
- *Advise the Governor as needed regarding any statutory, regulatory, or other issues of importance to New Americans in the Commonwealth;*
- *Collaborate with the Department of Social Services and other public and private entities to recognize and call attention to the significant contributions of New Americans in the Commonwealth; and*
- *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 executive summary shall be submitted as a report document as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents and reports and shall be posted to the General Assembly's website.*

The inaugural Board was appointed on October 16, 2020 and consists of sixteen non-legislative citizen members appointed by the Governor who represent or have experience with the faith community; local government; the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service; law-enforcement agencies; health, mental health, housing and workforce development organizations; organizations serving youth and the elderly; organizations providing legal services for immigrants; and educational institutions and institutions of higher education. In addition, the Director of Diversity, Opportunity and Inclusion for the Commonwealth and the Chairpersons of the Virginia Asian Advisory Board, the Latino Advisory Board, the Virginia African American Advisory Board, and the Council on Women, or their designees, shall serve ex officio with non-voting privileges. Non-legislative citizen members of the Board shall be residents of the Commonwealth.

The Board has adopted the following Guiding Principles that help provide the overarching focus with regard to the work of the Board. These Guiding principles include:

Recognizing our Value - The Board believes that investment in New Americans communities is an investment in individuals who bring significant value to the Commonwealth. This core tenet is critical to working towards a welcoming and economically thriving Commonwealth.

Ensuring Linguistic and Cultural Competencies - Linguistic and cultural barriers impact practically every aspect of the New American experience. Issues and access points must be evaluated with these barriers in mind. The Board expects to be very intentional about this area of focus and recognizes that it transcends issues and areas of responsibility in the state government.

Data Integrity - It is impossible to address issues and disparities without data to identify issues, understand disparities, and advocate for policy change. Data collection and accessibility must be modernized to accurately reflect today's Commonwealth and its makeup of race, ethnicity, national origin, and other identifiers. Every effort should be made to make data publicly available.

Championing Representation - The Board seeks to raise up New American communities so that they are able to represent themselves while advancing their community's integration and acculturation into the native-born communities. The principle calls for a specific focus on encouraging civic engagement from all New American communities.



Based on the Board's recognition that the issues impacting the New American communities are far-ranging and multifaceted, the Board has adopted a committee structure that will be flexible but allow for the deeper dives into the issues confronting these communities.

The Board shall conduct its work through the following **COMMITTEES**:

Access to Services Committee - This committee will focus on building awareness of the specific barriers that newcomers face in accessing services and resources. Additionally, the committee will review potential solutions and best practices that will address these barriers and improve equitable access.

This Committee will explore New Americans' access to services by:

- Building awareness in newcomer communities of available services and resources,
- Understanding the specific barriers that newcomers face in accessing these services and resources,
- Recommending strategies and processes to break down the barriers that keep newcomers from utilizing services and resources, and
- Exploring opportunities to provide basic services to all newcomer communities, despite immigration status (healthcare, food access, etc...).

This year's Access to Services Committee members include:

- Kate Ayers, Committee Lead
- James Gordon
- Andrei Lipan
- Daniel Villar
- Cuong Nguyen

Economic Opportunity Committee - This Committee will explore the economic landscape and review supports provided by the Commonwealth for workforce development and entrepreneurs. Most importantly, this committee will assess where barriers exist and provide recommendations to address these barriers. Additionally, this Committee will highlight potential economic development opportunities through foreign-born New Americans and their connectivity to their home countries.

This Committee will delve deeper into this work by:

- Assessing the economic impact of New Americans in the Commonwealth,
- Reviewing workforce development resources and employment opportunities,

- Reviewing self-employment and business supports, and
- Exploring cultural and linguistic barriers and how they affect the integration of New Americans into the economy.

This year's Economic Opportunity Committee members include:

- Eric-Michel Sossou-Gloh, Chair
- Ramsingh Krishendeo
- Susannah Lepley
- Karina Martich
- Zarmina Yusufi
- Dr. Milton Vickerman
- Panayiotis "Yoti" Jabri

Inter/Intra Governmental Affairs Committee - This Committee will explore the interconnectivity of governmental policy and changes to those policies that impact New Americans and their communities in the Commonwealth. The Committee seeks to provide holistic support to New Americans in the Commonwealth by:

- Identifying key governmental issues impacting their communities such as assistance and advocacy for naturalization.
- Providing program, policy, and regulation recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly.
- Monitoring federal, state, and local legislative issues and determining their impacts, and
- Identifying grant opportunities to support necessary programs and initiatives.

This year's Inter/Intra Governmental Affairs Committee members include:

- Michael Hoefler, Chair
- Hassan Ahmad
- Eric Lin
- Karina Lipsman
- Chris Mitchell
- Juan Santacoloma

The Board also has two dedicated **Language Access** leads in line with our Guiding Principle of **Ensuring Linguistic and Cultural Competence**. These leads seek to review language access plans and cultural competencies of the various state and local agencies that engage with the New American communities, throughout the Commonwealth. Additionally, the leads will support state efforts to create and implement a state language access plan that will create linguistic and culturally appropriate pathways for more effective immigrant integration into the Commonwealth.

This year's Language Access Co-Leads are:

- Dr. Ahoo Salem

The Board also has a dedicated **Data Integrity** lead in line with our Guiding Principles of **Data Integrity**. This lead seeks to support New Americans and all Virginia residents by publicizing and encouraging the collection of relevant data on the economic and demographic characteristics of VA immigrants.

- Michael Hoefler
- Dr. Milton Vickerman

DATA ON NEW AMERICANS IN THE COMMONWEALTH

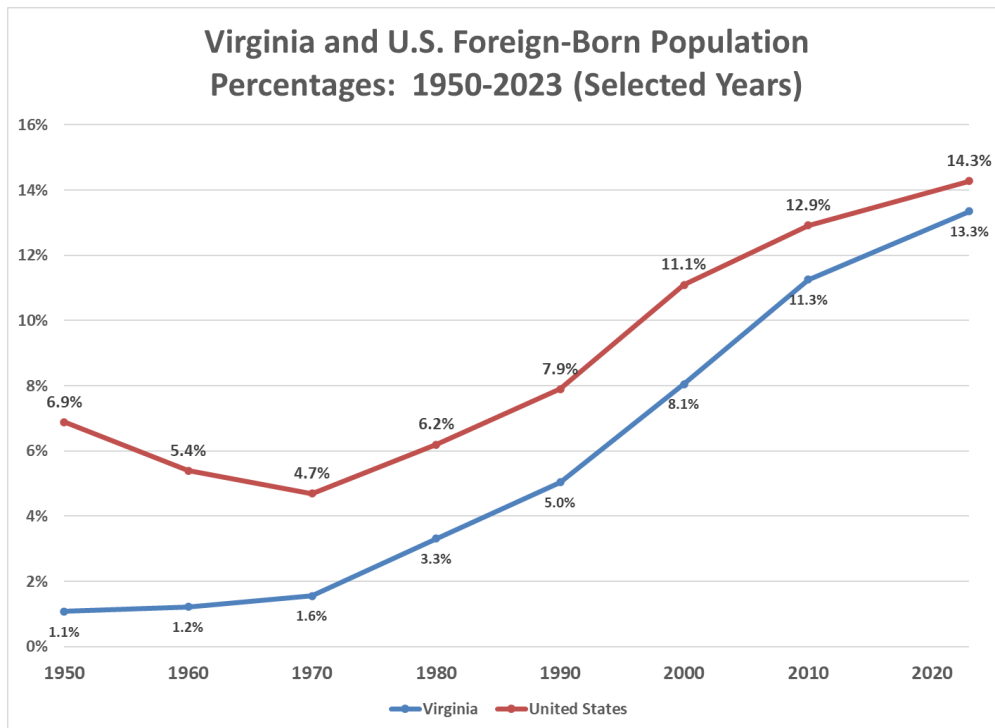
Our Board provided a comprehensive overview of Virginia’s New American population in the 2020-2021 Annual Report titled **New Americans in the Commonwealth: Changing Demographics**. We have updated the main demographic data from that report in this section and provided pertinent data from **Barriers to Integration of Virginia’s Immigrants: Challenges and Opportunities Identified through a Needs Assessment**, which was published and summarized in our 2021-22 report.

NEW AMERICAN DATA REVIEW: 2023-2024 ANNUAL REPORT

Population Change

Virginia’s total population more than doubled between 1960 (4.0 million) and 2023 (8.7 million), while the number of foreign-born persons in Virginia increased twenty-four times over the same period. As in other states, Virginia’s population grew and became more diverse in part due to the elimination of national restrictions on immigration by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. The Act eliminated restrictions on immigration that had favored northern and western European immigration to the United States. Pursuant to the 1965 reforms, Virginia’s foreign-born population grew from 72,000 in 1960 to 312,000 in 1990. It continued to increase to 1.16 million in 2023, the latest data available.⁵

Figure 1.



Sources: Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850 to 2000, Working Paper Number POP-WP081; The Foreign-Born Population in the U.S., U.S. Census Bureau, May 2012; Virginia State Data Profile, 2019 1-year ACS compiled by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2023, Subject Table S0501.

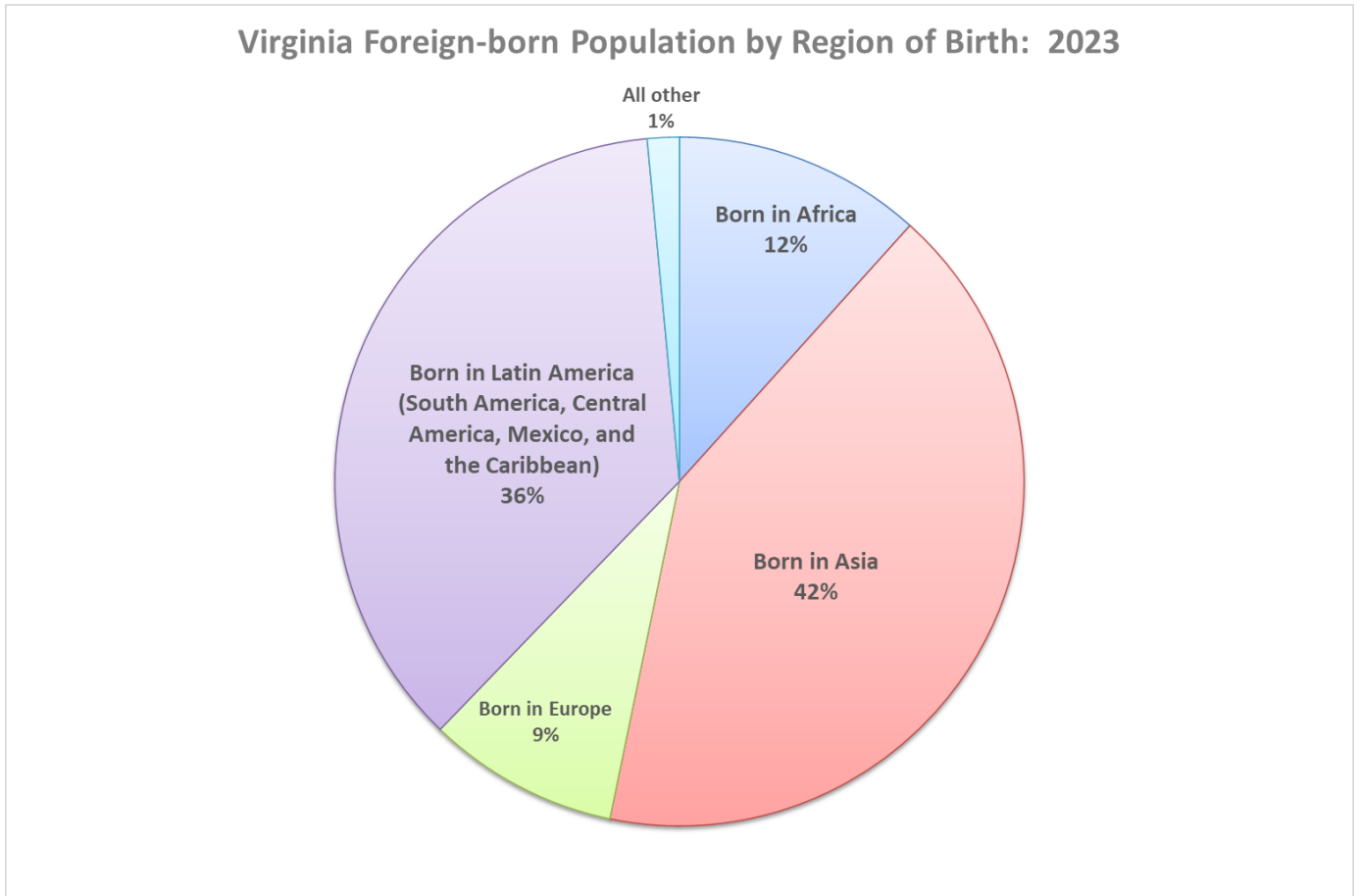
Overall, Virginia’s foreign-born population increased from 1.2% of total residents to 13.3% between 1960 and 2023 (see figure 1). Virginia was the 25th highest state in numbers of foreign-born persons in 1960 but has

⁵ [U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2023, ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Table S0501.](#)

increased more rapidly than other states. It has the 10th largest foreign-born population as of 2023. By comparison, the percent foreign-born in the United States increased from 5.4 percent in 1960 to 14.3 percent in 2023.

In 2023 most of Virginia’s foreign-born residents originated in Asia (42 percent) and Latin America (South American, Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean) (36 percent) (see Figure 2). Twelve percent were born in Africa and 9 percent in Europe.

Figure 2.



Source: [U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2023, ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Table S0501](#)

More than half of Virginia’s recent immigrants with legal status, specifically lawful permanent residents (otherwise known as “green card holders”) in Fiscal Years 2019-23 were born in ten countries. The leading countries were: India (10.6%), Afghanistan (8.9), and El Salvador (8.4), followed by China (3.7), Vietnam (3.4), the Philippines (3.3), Pakistan (3.3), Nepal (3.0), Mexico (2.9), and Honduras. Seven of the top ten source countries are in Asia.⁶ The number of Afghans gaining lawful permanent status in 2023 (4,310) more than doubled compared to 2022 (1,964).

⁶ [Office of Immigration Statistics, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Lawful Permanent Residents Supplementary Data Tables, Table 1, various years.](#)

Labor Force and Economics

New Americans are integral to Virginia’s economic growth. They are a growing share of Virginia’s workforce, in part because immigration is at historically high levels, but also due to a slowdown in the supply of U.S.-born workers following years of declining birth rates. The National Academy of Sciences finds that “The vast majority of current and future net workforce growth—which, at less than 1 percent annually, is very slow by historical standards—will be accounted for by immigrants and their U.S.-born descendants.”⁷

Indeed, the percentage of employed civilians in Virginia who were foreign born rose from 9.8 percent in 2000 to 18.2 percent in 2023, and it will continue to grow into the future (See Figure 3). Nearly half of the growth in the VA workforce between 2000 and 2023 was due to immigration. We previously estimated that 21 percent of Virginia residents under 18 years old (the next generation of workers) were immigrants or children of immigrants.⁸ We believe it is our duty to invest in these children through education, and to remove any cultural or language barriers so that they can reach their full potential.

Figure 3.
Virginia Civilian Labor Force, Foreign and Total Population: 2000 and 2023

Civilian labor force (age 16 and older)	2023			2000		
	Foreign Born	Total	% Foreign Born	Foreign Born	Total	% Foreign Born
Population	1,099,153	7,066,427	15.6%	523,188	5,532,460	9.5%
Civilian labor force	794,688	4,482,631	17.7%	346,595	3,562,712	9.7%
% in the civilian labor force	72.3%	63.4%		66.2%	64.4%	
Civilian Employed Workers	783,696	4,317,587	18.2%	332,866	3,410,706	9.8%

Source: [U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2023, ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Table S0501](#), and [DP03: Selected Economic Characteristics](#), and 2000 Census.

New immigrants are particularly important additions to the workforce during periods of tight labor markets such as we have experienced the past several years. The unemployment rate in Virginia was only 2.7 percent in July 2024, compared to the national rate of 4.3 percent. Virginia had the sixth lowest unemployment rate among the various states and the District of Columbia. The most recently available unemployment data for Virginia by national origin show that the foreign-born rate was 2.7 percent in 2023, slightly higher than the 2.3 percent rate of native-born VA residents.⁹

The successful integration of immigrants and their children into the workforce also builds Virginia’s economy and contributes to State and Local resources through tax collections. The American Immigration Council estimates that immigrant households in Virginia in 2022 had \$58.5 billion in income, paid \$5.1 billion in state and local income taxes, and paid \$11.1 billion in federal taxes.¹⁰ The median household income of foreign-born households (with earnings) in Virginia was \$136,860 in 2023, compared to \$121,800 for U.S.-born households.¹¹ This difference is partly due to family size differences as median individual incomes for foreign-born full-time workers are slightly lower than native born: \$67,640 for foreign-born males vs. \$72,100 for native-born males, \$58,470 for foreign-

⁷ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2017. *The Economic and Fiscal Consequences of Immigration*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/23550>, page 4.

⁸ 2021-2022 Office of New Americans Advisory Board Report, October 2022, Table 17.

⁹ [U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2023, ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Table S0501](#).

¹⁰ [American Immigration Council, State Fact Sheet, Immigrants in Virginia, Taxes and Spending Power](#)

¹¹ [S0501: Selected Characteristics of the Native and Foreign-born Populations - Census Bureau Table](#)

born females vs. \$57,940 for native-born females.¹² Immigrant and U.S. born head of households had an identical poverty rate of 10.2 percent in 2023.¹³

New Americans also contribute to job growth due to their high rate of entrepreneurship. The American Immigration Council estimates that there are 86,100 immigrant entrepreneurs in Virginia as of 2022 with a total business income of \$2.7 billion. While immigrants are 16.2 percent of the total civilian workforce, they account for 23.0 percent of Virginia’s entrepreneurs.¹⁴

Immigrant workers are concentrated in occupations at both the low- and high-skill levels. Immigrants tend to be more concentrated in “service occupations” and “natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations” than the native born (See Figure 4).

Figure 4.
Major Occupations of the Virginia Civilian Labor Force, Foreign and U.S. born: 2023

Occupations	Foreign-born	U.S. born
Civilian Workers Age 16 and Older	754,189	3,563,811
% Civilian Workers Employed in		
Managemen, business, science, and arts occupations	46.5%	49.8%
Service occupations	18.9	14.5
Sales and office occupations	13.9	18.3
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	10.3	6.7
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	10.4	10.6

Source: [S0501: Selected Characteristics of the Native and Foreign-born Populations - Census Bureau Table.](#)

Virginia’s New Americans bring skills and experiences that have contributed to 49 percent of the growth in our workforce over the past 2 decades. They have higher labor force participation rates and slightly higher median household incomes compared to native born residents. New Americans also have high rates of entrepreneurship and are essential workers in, for example, the healthcare and construction sectors. We need to continue to support them as they will account for an even greater share of the labor force in the coming decades, not only to benefit them, but also for the continued economic growth of Virginia. We support them by providing culturally and linguistically accessible healthcare services, supporting their education and English language learning, and streamlining career pathways.

¹² [S0501: Selected Characteristics of the Native and Foreign-born Populations - Census Bureau Table](#)

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ [American Immigration Council, State Fact Sheet, Immigrants in Virginia, Entrepreneurship,](#)

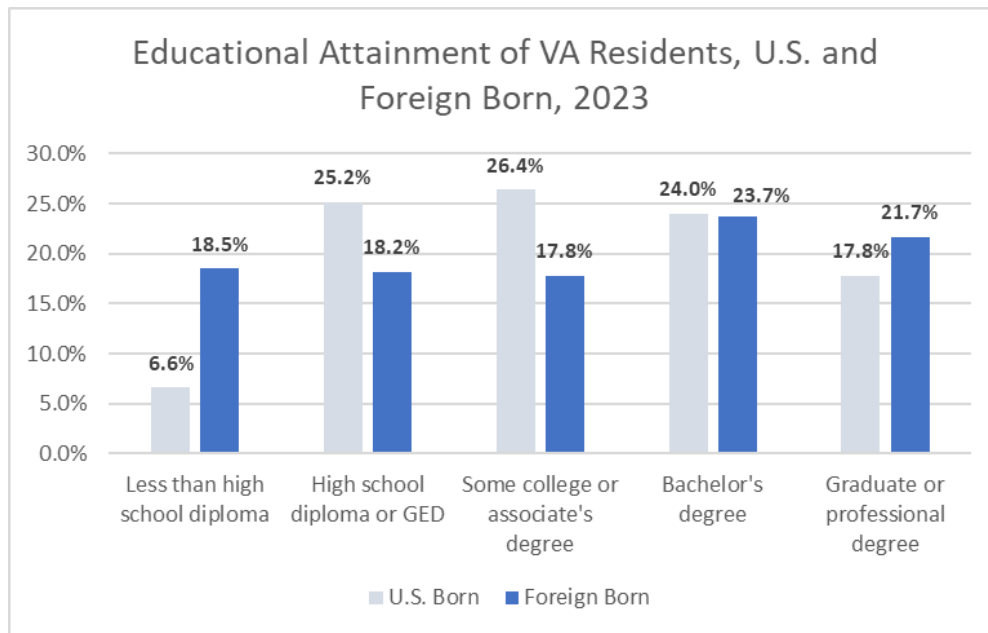
Language Proficiency

More than 38 percent of Virginia’s foreign-born residents in 2022 were Limited English Proficient (LEP). About 17 percent report only speaking English at home and nearly 45 percent state that they speak English “very well.” Nearly 52 percent of non-citizens are LEP, while 29 percent of naturalized citizens report that they are LEP.¹⁵

Education

Immigrants in Virginia as of 2023 exhibit a bimodal educational pattern, with 45.4 percent holding a college degree, but 18.5 percent failed to finish high school (see figure 5). An estimated 41.8 percent of Virginia’s native-born population has a college degree, while only 6.6 percent lack at least a high school degree.

Figure 5.



Source: [S0501: Selected Characteristics of the Native and Foreign-born Populations - Census Bureau Table.](#)

While 45 percent of Virginia’s foreign-born residents have a college degree, the Migration Policy Institute reports that nearly 19 percent of these graduates are underutilized, i.e., they are unemployed or employed in low-skilled jobs.¹⁶

¹⁵ [State Demographics Data Virginia 2022 | migrationpolicy.org](#)

¹⁶ Ibid.

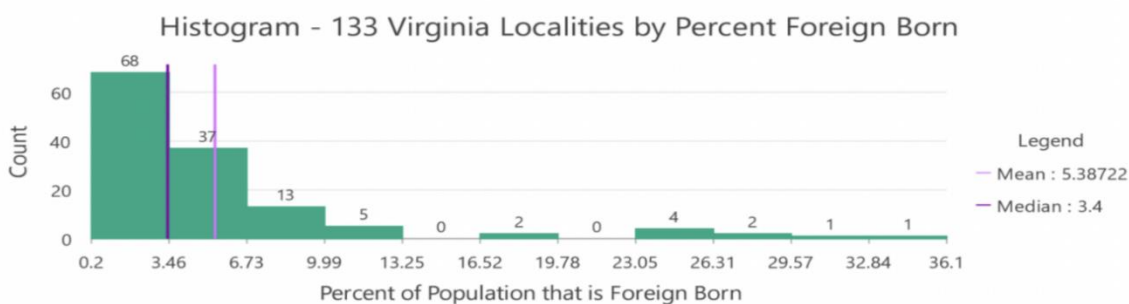
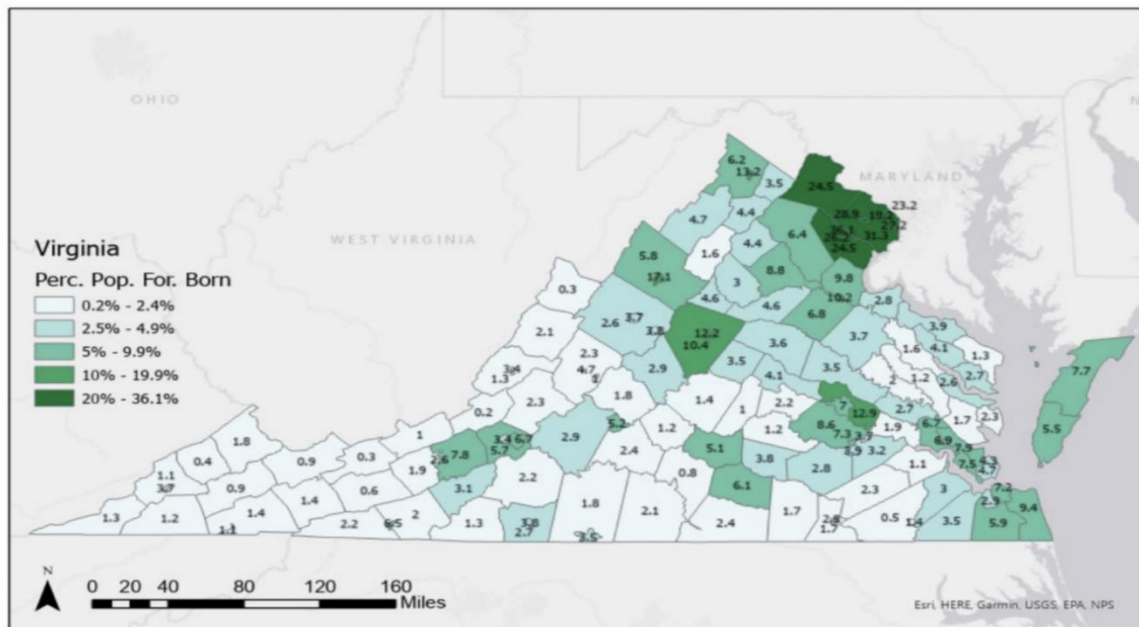
Immigrant Population Distribution at the Local Level

Two-thirds of all immigrants live in Northern Virginia as of 2019, but sizable immigrant communities exist in Richmond, Roanoke and other metropolitan areas throughout the commonwealth. In fact, certain census tracts in Accomack, Rockingham and Lunenburg Counties have immigrant densities similar to many parts of Northern Virginia.

As can be seen from the histogram below, the immigrant population exceeds 10% of the population in only fifteen of 133 localities, while sixty-eight localities have an immigrant community that represents less than 3.5% of the population. Manassas Park City (36.1%) and Fairfax (31.3%) are the only localities where more than 3 in 10 residents are an immigrant. Craig County is at the other end of the spectrum – only 0.2% of its population is foreign-born.

Smaller cities, such as Harrisonburg (17.1%), Winchester (13.2%) and Charlottesville (12.2%), alongside Henrico County (12.9%), represent the localities with the greatest concentrations of immigrants outside of Northern Virginia. Importantly, not all localities where immigrants make up more than 5% of the population are cities. The Eastern Shore as well as Prince Edward and Lunenburg Counties represent non-urban contexts that still contain significant immigrant populations.

Figure 6.



Source: *Barriers to Integration of Virginia’s Immigrants: Challenges and Opportunities Identified through a Needs Assessment (2022)*

BOARD ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH 2023-2024

GENERAL BOARD MEETINGS

The Board was created through legislation passed in the 2020 General Assembly session and the inaugural board was appointed on October 16, 2020. Since the last submission of our report the Board held the following general meetings:

- January 8, 2024 – Virtual Meeting
- April 17, 2024 – Richmond
- July 10, 2024 – Virtual Meeting
- October 9, 2024 – Richmond

The following guest speakers at our meetings provided substantive guidance and information that has contributed to the work of the Board and this report.

- Dr. Danny Avula – Commissioner, Department of Social Services
- Seyoum Berhe - Director, Virginia Office of New Americans
- Karen Legato - Executive Director, Health Brigade
- Susannah Lepley - Director, CWS Harrisonburg

BOARD MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

Additionally, the members of the Board have engaged in their appointed capacity in the following manner:

- Participation in statewide Virginia Community Capacity Initiative Meetings (VCCI) in Roanoke, Harrisonburg, Charlottesville, Richmond, and Tidewater, 2023 and 2024
- Participation in Office of New Americans Annual Review
- Participation in introduction meeting with Martin Brown and Michel Perez, Office of Diversity, Equality, and Opportunity, 2024
- Participation in an introduction meeting with Dr. Danny Avula, former Director of DSS, 2024
- Participation in Afghan Support Center, January 2024
- Participation in Executive Pickleball Social, Northern Virginia
- Participation in Asian American Policy Forum, Northern Virginia
- Participation in Congressman Beyer’s Annual Conference on Women
- Guest speaker at Office of The Directorate of National Intelligence D&I Event for fireside chat on Domestic Violence.
- Interview on the topic of Honor Violence by former FBI Supervisory Special Agent Nancy Aguilar for the law enforcement centered podcast Badass in Heels.
- Participation in meeting with the minister of Celebration Church of the Tri-Cities to discuss the Ukrainian community in the region.

OUTREACH

Board members also attended or engaged with the following organizations and their representatives in conducting the work of the Board and creation of this report.

- Liliana Penalver - Senior Program Consultant, Office of New Americans
- Wendy Shoaf - Procurement Specialist, Department of Social Services
- Seyoum Berhe - Director, Virginia Office of New Americans
- Ali Ahmad - Director of Policy and Legislative Affairs, Governor Youngkin
- Patrick McKenna - Director, Virginia Coalition Against Human Trafficking

WORK WITH ONA

The Office of New Americans Advisory Board was given the responsibility of reporting on the Office of New Americans. This year, ONAAB and ONA worked together on an initiative that resulted in Virginia receiving federal funding for a program that provides mental health services to a New American population.

OFFICE OF NEW AMERICANS ADVISORY BOARD COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

ACCESS TO SERVICES

The Access to Services (A2S) Committee focuses on building awareness of the specific barriers that newcomers face in accessing services and resources. The committee reviews potential solutions and best practices that will address these barriers with the goal of providing better outcomes towards their economic opportunities.

Executive Order Recommendation:

As part of the goal of building awareness of specific barriers New Americans face and promoting solutions, the A2S Committee recommends implementing an Executive Order that would end Honor Violence.

Preventing Honor Violence - Executive Order Proposal

How Governor Glenn Youngkin will lead nationally by passing an Executive Order that prohibits Honor Violence in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

- Currently, no state or federal legislation exists in the United States making honor violence illegal. A 2018 study¹⁷ published by the Department of Justice, outlined honor violence as a persistent and continued issue across the United States. Among the issues identified in honor violence included: honor killings, honor-based domestic violence, forced marriage, and female genital mutilation. The Department of Justice specifically stated in their study that no current laws exist on honor violence in the United States.
- The proposed E.O. would build on existing Virginia laws - child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM).
- Due to an increase in refugee and immigrant populations in Virginia, this law needs to take effect to protect current and incoming children of immigrants and refugees who are resettling in Virginia.
 - Some members of their own families still engage in harmful traditional practices (HTP)¹⁸ as this issue is found to be prevalent in populations stemming from the Philippines, Latin America, Middle East/Northern Africa (MENA) and South Asia – especially Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, and Nepal. (According to a study in Germany, families who assimilated did not experience issues of honor violence.)

¹⁷ U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, [Executive Order 13166](#)

¹⁸ Practices that involve forms of gendered violence or ritual discrimination that have become culturally normalized (ex: child marriage, FGM)

How Honor Violence Executive Order Helps

This proposed E.O. provides a legal policy to assist those who engage in public service to help honor violence victims by providing much needed and overdue legal vocabulary that is enshrined in law books.

- This will be a massive first step in collecting statistics on reported honor violence incidents that are already known to be occurring in Virginia, but are inaccurately classified in case files during an investigation.
- This will also help protect children who may be victims since school counselors are currently unable to report “honor violence” as a legitimate legal matter to law enforcement or social services.

What is Honor Violence?

Honor Violence occurs when perpetrators perceive that a relative has shamed the family and/or community by breaking their honor code.

- Honor Violence aims to control relatives, to prevent them from behaving in a manner that risks violating the honor of a man, the family, relatives or the collective/community. Honor based abuse, violence, and/or oppression is thus a way of exerting power.

What Can Lead to Honor Violence?

Typical reasons include being in a relationship or having associations with social groups outside the family that may lead to the social exclusion of a family (stigma-by-association).

- Examples are refusing to enter into an arranged marriage, dowry abuse, seeking a divorce or marital separation, engaging in interfaith relationships or relationship with persons from a different caste, disability, being the victim of a sexual crime, dressing in clothing/jewelry/accessories that may be associated with sexual deviance, engaging in a relationship in spite of moral marriage impediments or bans, homosexuality, having premarital, extramarital, or postmarital sex (in case of divorce or widowship).
- Family members will also use brothers (including younger brothers) or Uncles to monitor the behavior of girls.
 - This also perpetuates a cycle that keeps boys in a monitoring and bullying role which then transforms them into an abusive husband role. This role and cycle then continues with their own wife and daughter/son with monitoring and/or bullying roles.

The threat of murder is also used as a means to control behavior, especially concerning marriage and sexuality – which may be seen as a duty for some or all family members to uphold. Family members may feel compelled to act to preserve the reputation of the family in the community and avoid stigma or shunning, particularly in tight-knit communities.

When Honor Violence turns into Honor Killings

Honor Killing¹⁹ is a form of murder after a person is subjected to intense abuse psychologically and physically and then is killed by, or at the behest of members of their family or their partner, due to the traditional practice (in some countries) of killing a family member who is believed to have brought shame on the family.²⁰

¹⁹ Shame Killing used by Kofi Annan Annan, Kofi (5 June 2000). "Secretary-General, in Address to "Women 2000" Special Session, Says Future of Planet Depends Upon Women". United Nations.

²⁰ Merriam Webster Dictionary definition of Honor Killing, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/honor%20killing>

- Honor killings are often connected to forms of hierarchical social stratification, religion, caste, or sexuality. Most often, it involves the murder of a girl or woman by male family members (female family members are known to take part in the murder) due to the perpetrators' belief that the victim has brought dishonor or shame upon the family name, reputation or prestige.²¹
- Honor killings are believed to have originated from tribal customs and are performed in communities with the intent to punish violations of social, sexual, religious or family norms or hierarchies. In many cases, the honor killings are committed by family members against a female relative considered to have disgraced her family.

In Conclusion: Virginia Is a Safe Destination

We want Virginia to be a safe destination. This also includes safety from antiquated harmful practices that some people may still practice today which hold girls back as they progress in society. The Commonwealth of Virginia is always a force to be reckoned with in leading legislation to protect girls in its state: from being the first to spark the national movement to end child marriage in 2016, to recently being the first southern state to completely ban the practice.

The Commonwealth is also incredibly welcoming to so many immigrants and refugees from many nations across the globe who escape war, hunger, and civil strife to manifest their own destiny onto this land of opportunity.

Passing an Executive Order that prevents honor violence in Virginia – ***the first ever in the United States*** -- will do just that.

Education Recommendations:

In 2024, the A2S continued to discuss one area where New Americans need better access to (1) English Language Learning.

Improve access to English language learning for refugees and immigrants in Virginia.

- Provide specific avenues for local literacy programs to gain access and utilize federal and state funding
- Encourage public/private partnerships that could fund English classes and address barriers. For example, large employers of New Americans could partner with a literacy agency to provide onsite English for their employees.
- Dedicate one of the new Virginia Department of Education Lab schools to English Language Learning
- Facilitate transition from ESOL programs to institute of higher education by investing in Bridge Programs that address the English proficiency and college readiness needs of New Americans.
- Provide accessible information about associate and trade-based programs with a direct tie to the labor market and ensure high-demand courses are made known and opened to diverse groups.

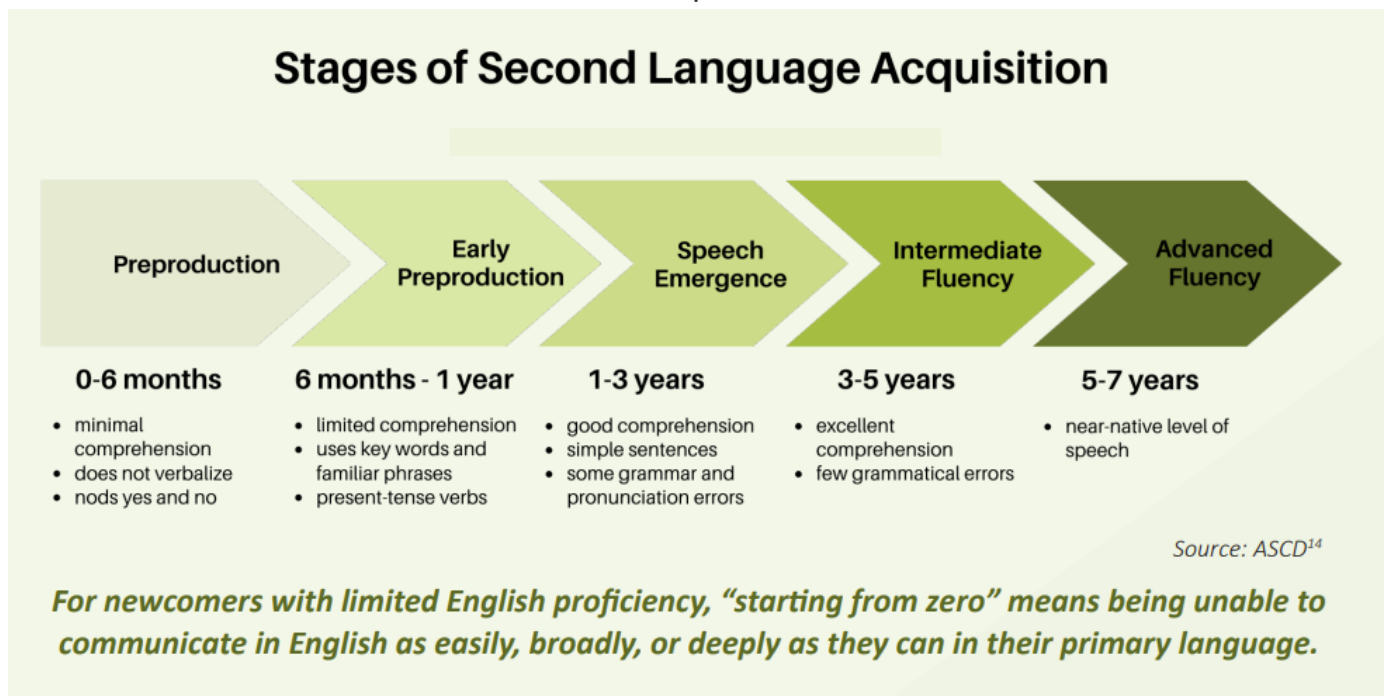
²¹ Oberwittler, Dietrich; Kasselt, Julia (2014). "Honor Killings". In Gartner, Rosemary; McCarthy, Bill (eds.). *The Oxford Handbook of Gender, Sex, and Crime*.

SUPPORT ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

A report published in 2022 about the integration outcomes of forcibly displaced persons²² cites that English language acquisition was the number one priority of New Americans, but cited an overwhelming need for more dedicated time and support to learn English.

Learning a new language is a lengthy, arduous process. Understanding vocabulary words is one thing. Being able to follow a spoken conversation, recall corresponding words, and use them correctly in a sentence is another. Research shows that it can take 3-5 years of intensive study to reach intermediate level fluency²³.

Figure 7.



Source: Classroom Instruction That Works with English Language Learners: Facilitator’s Guide, Chapter 2: The Stages of Second Language Acquisition

Common barriers to learning English include lack of transportation and childcare, not enough time in class, and lack of qualified teachers. Many community-based organizations that offer English classes only have funding to offer classes once a week and often rely on unqualified volunteers to teach and tutor students. In addition, many New Americans spend more than full time hours working to support their family, leaving even less time to study and learn English.

New Americans are eager to learn English, but lack of accessible English classes make it difficult for them to learn higher levels of proficiency. When considering accessibility, the following things should be taken into consideration:

- Locations of classes in proximity to where Newcomer Communities live and work
- Hours of class time offered

²² Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative, [Integration Outcomes for Forcibly Displaced Persons](#)

²³Hill, J.D. and Björk, C.L. (2008) [Classroom Instruction That Works with English Language Learners: Facilitator’s Guide, Chapter 2: The Stages of Second Language Acquisition](#), Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development,

- Teacher certification requirements to teach classes
- Levels of English offered

Ensure that New Americans can access higher education programs.

Community colleges are a key point of access to higher education for many ESOL learners due to their affordability and flexible options. However, lower levels of English proficiency, academic readiness, and digital skills make the transition to community colleges more challenging for ESOL learners than native English speakers²⁴. Moreover, Adult ESOL learners often lack knowledge about the US college system, available course and career pathways, financial aid programs and their obligations. Additionally, immigrants and refugees often have limited social networks to guide them through the complex college application and enrollment process²⁵. Bridge classes built upon the skills learners acquire in ESOL classes and follow the College and Career Readiness Standards to provide learners with the skills needed for full engagement in English language arts, literacy, mathematics, and science. As such Bridge classes are well-suited to address our community's increased demand for affordable and high-quality ESOL services and provides English proficiency, college readiness skills, and mentorship support needed for a successful transition to higher education settings. These services support immigrant and refugee's socio cultural integration, promote socio-economic mobility²⁶, and ultimately enhance our community's overall quality of life.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Economic issues loom large for immigrants and can disproportionately motivate the difficult decision to leave their country. Even when other issues serve as proximate causes for migration – e.g., ethnic, or political persecution – economic motives typically remain important. As with other Virginians, our New Americans pursue economic opportunity primarily through employment and entrepreneurship. However, unlike the general populace, New Americans encounter more barriers to economic opportunity due to language and cultural barriers in addition to lack of access to capital and corporate or business competencies.

The Economic Opportunity Committee explores the economic landscape and reviews what support is provided by the Commonwealth for New American workforce development and entrepreneurs. Most importantly, this committee assesses where barriers exist and provides recommendations to address these barriers.

New Americans Economic Forum

ONAAB has identified the need for an economic forum for New Americans. This forum would serve to not only spark a conversation, but also create an action plan and thus promote Virginia and make our Commonwealth a more attractive destination for workforce development, international trade, and foreign investment. To successfully develop this forum, we have identified three governmental agencies that can help: Virginia Economic Development Partnership, Department of Workforce Development and Advancement, and the Secretary of Commerce and Trade.

²⁴ American Institutes for Research [\(2018\) Serving English language learners in higher education: unlocking the potential](#); American Institutes for Research [\(2016\) English language proficiency standards for adult education](#).

²⁵ Liebert, S. and Grant, R. (2022) [Barriers to Integration of Virginia’s Immigrants: Challenges and Opportunities Identified through a Needs Assessment](#), VCU Douglas L. Wilder School of Government and Policy

²⁶ Teranishi, R. T., Suárez-Orozco, C., & Suárez-Orozco, M. (2011). [Immigrants in community college: Toward greater knowledge and awareness](#). *The Future of Children*, 21(1), 153–169.

Outline:

Name and Purpose:

- **Name:** Virginia New American Economic Forum (VNAEF)
- **Purpose:** To act as a central hub for dialogue, resource sharing, and collaboration among key stakeholders, including nonprofit organizations, state agencies, businesses, and New American populations. The forum will aim to be a nexus between the New American population and state agencies, nonprofits, and private sector companies and provide economic opportunity.

Key Functions:

- **Economic Integration:** Develop programs or ideas to facilitate the economic integration of New Americans, including job training, entrepreneurship support, and financial literacy initiatives.
- **Partnership Building:** Facilitate partnerships between businesses and New American communities to enhance employment opportunities and support economic growth.
- **Resource Coordination:** Coordinate resources and services provided by non-profits and state agencies to ensure they meet the needs of New American populations effectively.
- **Advocacy and Policy Development:** Advocate for policies and practices that support the economic well-being of New Americans and contribute to their successful integration into the local economy.

Expected Outcomes:

- Increased economic opportunities for New Americans through targeted support and resources.
- Enhanced collaboration between nonprofits, businesses, and state agencies.
- Improved integration of New American populations into the local economy.
- Strengthened community resilience and economic vitality.

By establishing the New American Economic Forum, we aim to create a structured and supportive environment that promotes the economic well-being and successful integration of New Americans into our Commonwealth's economy.

Workforce Development Recommendations

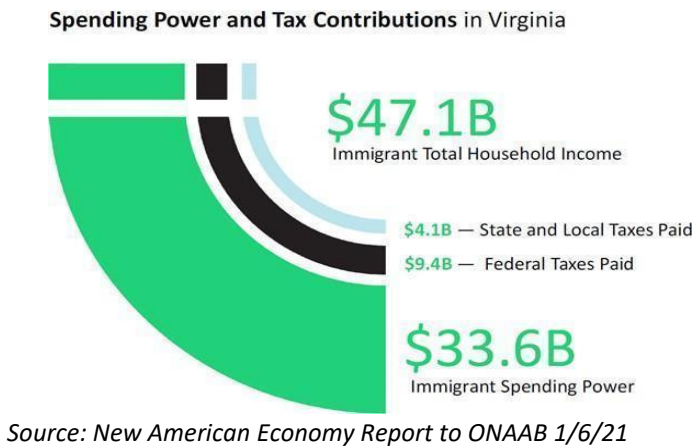
- Through Budgetary action, provide funding to the Office of New Americans and the Department of Labor to study employment and educational history of New Americans to determine focus of career pathway programs, and New American capacity to fill employment gaps in the state.
- Through Budgetary action, provide funding to the Office of New Americans, the Department of Labor, Virginia Economic Development Partnership, and the Department of Education to explore further opportunities to recruit New American talent and retain them through statewide employment initiatives.
- Through Budgetary action, provide funding to the Office of New Americans and the Department of

Labor to review licensing and certification criteria and develop, translate, and disseminate career pathway maps

SUPPORT WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

In our 2021 Annual Report we noted that when New Americans are employed in our businesses or able to pursue their entrepreneurial dreams, they generate billions of dollars in revenue or income, tax payment, and consumer spending. These economic contributions support our state and local governments, our private sector, and our public infrastructure.

Figure 8.



The ONAAB has explored the critical economic areas of workforce development and entrepreneurial support. We believe that there are significant opportunities to support these areas. Which in turn will provide better returns on the investment in these communities.

As the world continues to change around us, we also see changes in the attitudes towards the New American population that other states have embraced. Since 2014, Michigan has adopted an aggressive talent acquisition and retention program for New Americans. Former Governor Rick Snyder specifically created Michigan’s Office of New Americans to address the loss of talent and skilled employees due to the downturn in the automotive industry.

Similarly, fifteen states have also created Offices of New Americans or other offices to focus on successful immigrant integration. These states are California, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Washington, Wisconsin, and Virginia²⁷.

Leaders in these states have looked at their changing demographics, and have concluded that leveraging growing New American populations will result in increased talent, skills and resources. These valuable elements can allow economies to better compete in the national and global market. Virginia must attract and retain New American talent. Here are some compelling reasons why this is important to the Commonwealth:

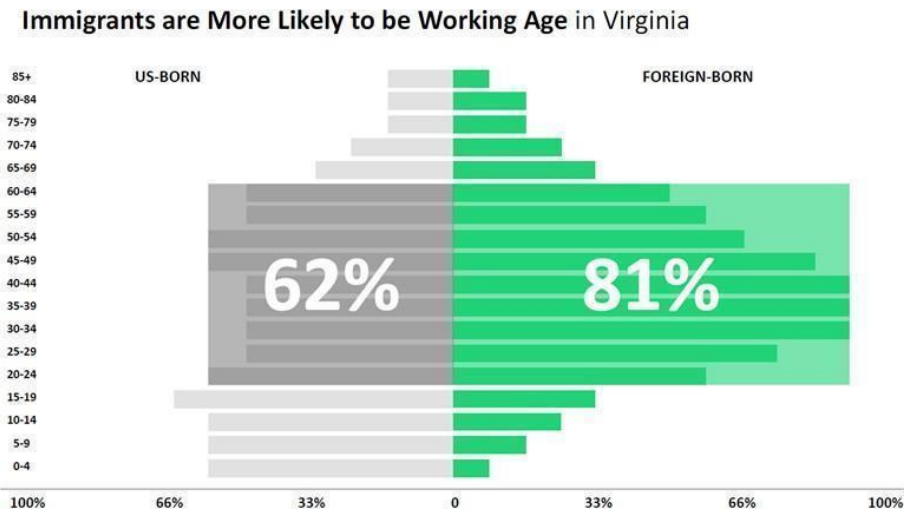
Working Age Population

Since 2000, immigrant workers and their children have become the major contributors to our workforce

²⁷ American Immigration Council, [Office of New Americans \(ONA\) State Network - New American Economy](#)
2023-2024 Office of New Americans Advisory Board Report - October 2024

growth.²⁸ The average age of the native-born population in the Commonwealth has steadily increased as the baby boomers have progressed towards retirement age. Figure 9 illustrates the demographic trends that make our New American workforce even more critical to sustained economic growth for the Commonwealth and nation.

Figure 9.



Source: *New American Economy Report to ONAAB 1/6/21*

Engagement Across Industries

New American workers are engaged in all industries. Depending on skill sets, education and past opportunities, our New American workers range from laborers to professionals. According to a Joint Economic Committee report from 2021 (Figure 10), our national immigrant workforce represents significant portions of our essential work sectors.

Figure 10.

Immigrants Disproportionately Work in "Essential" Sectors	
Sector	Share of Workers Who Are Immigrants
Manufacturing	19%
Transportation and Utilities	20%
Professional and Business Services	21%
Leisure and Hospitality	21%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	23%
Construction	28%
Overall	18%

Source: *Joint Economic Committee "Immigrants are Vital to the US Economy" 4/26/21*

This has not been more apparent than during the last 2 years of the Covid-19 pandemic. Reports show that during the pandemic, New American health care workers were disproportionately responsible for in-person care and were essential workers on the front lines. Nationally, New Americans make up 38 percent of home

health aides, 29 percent of physicians and 22 percent of nursing assistants.²⁹ In Virginia, where New Americans making up 12.7 percent of the population, 29.4 percent are physicians and surgeons, 18.7 percent are health aides and 14.0% are nurses.³⁰New Americans are disproportionately responsible for in-person health care, This underscoring the availability and type of talent that resides within the New American workforce.

National efforts are being made to highlight this bridge to global talent. Initiatives such as World Education Services Global Talent Bridge³¹ are increasingly focusing on the economic benefits of immigration. World Education Services Global Talent Bridge is dedicated to helping skilled immigrants fully utilize their talents and education to achieve professional and academic goals. They focus on uplifting these skilled workers through their Skilled Immigrant Integration Program³².

Virginia was recently a participant in this program focused on supporting foreign-born educators to help fill teacher shortages in our public-school systems. The number of Virginia teacher vacancies exceeded 2,500 teaching positions in the 2021-2022 school year³³. And for the 2022-2023 school year, the top 10 critical teaching shortages include Elementary Education K-6, Middle School Grade 6-8, Mathematics Grades 6-12, Science, and Foreign Language PreK-12. These are all areas that potential teachers from the New American workforce can fill.

In order to help alleviate the Commonwealth's teacher shortage, Senate Bill 68 permits the Board of Education to provide a provisional license to educators who were certified or licensed to teach within the last 5 years³⁴. Fortunately, SB 68 was passed by the General Assembly and signed by Governor Youngkin to help alleviate the Commonwealth's teacher shortage.

Talent Acquisition

There are many avenues for attracting talent. Some occur organically, while others are driven by employers. The Commonwealth has several initiatives focused on the attraction of talent to the state. The Virginia Economic Development Partnership and Department of Labor are leading many talent acquisition initiatives that focus on developing talent and putting them to work. Even with programs like Virginia's Tech Talent Investment Program³⁵, Virginia Talent Accelerator Program³⁶, and Virginia Career Works³⁷ there are still more opportunities to attract, develop and retain talent within the New American communities.

While the foreign-born are 12.7 percent of Virginia's 2022 population, 22.8 percent of STEM workers are New Americans. While this signals that we are attracting talent, we are not leveraging one of our best resources – our centers of higher education – to do so. Each year, almost 600,000 patents are filed by companies, research centers and institutes of higher learning³⁸. And in a study from by the New American Economy in 2012 these details are compelling:

²⁹Batalova, J. (2020) [Immigrant Workers: Vital to the U.S. COVID-19 Response, Disproportionately Vulnerable](#), Migration Policy Institute

³⁰Rich, A. (2021) [New Americans in Virginia - An overview of immigrants' contributions to the commonwealth](#), New American Economy

³¹ World Education Services, [Global Talent Bridge](#)

³² World Education Services, [Skilled Immigrant Integration Program](#)

³³ Virginia Department of Education, [VDOE Staffing and Vacancy Report](#)

³⁴ Favola, B. (2022) [SB 68 Provisional teacher licensure; teachers licensed or certified outside of the United States.](#), Virginia Legislative Information System

³⁵ Virginia Economic Development Partnership, [Virginia's Tech Talent Investment Program](#)

³⁶ Virginia Economic Development Partnership, [Virginia Talent Accelerator Program](#)

³⁷ [Virginia Career Works](#)

³⁸ U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, [U.S. Patent Activity Calendar Years 1790 to the Present](#)

- 76 percent of the patents had a foreign-born inventor.
- 54 percent of the patents were awarded to the group of foreign inventors most likely to face visa hurdles: students, postdoctoral fellows, or staff researchers.
- Foreign-born inventors played significant roles in the fields of semiconductor device manufacturing (87 percent), information technology (84 percent), pulse or digital communications (83 percent), pharmaceutical drugs or drug compounds (79 percent) and optics (77 percent).
- The nearly 1,500 patents represented inventors from 88 different countries.

From 2012 until 2021, the number of international students in the United States rose from 819,644³⁹ to 914,095.⁴⁰ Virginia has some of the highest ranked universities and colleges in the country, yet Virginia is not a top 10 destination for international students, and no Virginia higher education institution is within the top 20 schools for international students.⁴¹ This is a lost opportunity to attract talent to the Commonwealth and potentially retain them as a highly educated and skilled workforce.

There is opportunity to leverage our notable universities and colleges to become talent attractors.

Worker Licensure

Another avenue for attracting talent is to find ways to leverage the talent that already exists in the Commonwealth. Many New Americans who come to the Commonwealth possess valuable skills and experience. Unfortunately, these skills and experience are not being utilized due to specific education or certification requirements. As noted earlier, recent legislation (SB68) has created pathways for teachers who were licensed educators in foreign countries to work provisionally in Virginia to help alleviate an area of dire need. There are many other industries that have similar needs. Virginia Career Works and the Virginia Office of Education Economics has identified a list of high demand occupations for 2021-2022⁴². This list includes several areas of need that we have already noted as areas the New Americans have excelled:

- Business/Finance
- Education
- Computers/Math/Engineering
- Construction
- Healthcare
- Production and Transportation/Material Moving³⁷

If Virginia could address opportunities and create career pathways to licensure and employment in these areas, we could address some areas of greatest need while leveraging valuable skills and experience available in the New American communities.

The Global Michigan Office has created these pathways and have made the information readily accessible through their Career Pathway Guides through their Licensing and Regulatory Affairs office⁴³. Here, immigrant residents can find more than 40 Career Pathway Guides to chart a path to licensure and, in some cases, create simplified pathways to licensure.

³⁹ Ruiz, N. G. (2014) [The Geography of Foreign Students in U.S. Higher Education: Origins and Destinations](#), Brookings Institute

⁴⁰ Open Doors, [2021 Fast Facts: International Students](#)

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Virginia Economic Development Partnership, [Virginia's 2021-2022 High Demand Occupations List and Underlying Methodology Report](#)

⁴³ Michigan Licensing and Regulatory Affairs, [An Online Resource for Skilled Immigrant](#)

INTER/INTRA GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

Everyone in the Commonwealth is impacted by federal, state, and local policies and rules, but it can be especially difficult for New Americans because of their unfamiliarity with state government offices and programs, and / or their lack of language ability. The Office of New Americans has been given the primary responsibility to address the needs of New Americans as they are required to:

Provide advice and assistance to state agencies regarding (i) the coordination of relevant policies across state agencies responsible for education, workforce, and training programs, including professional licensure guidance, small business development, worker protection, refugee resettlement, citizenship and voter education or engagement programs, housing programs, and other related programs, and (ii) the dissemination of information to localities and immigration service organizations regarding state programs that help New Americans find and secure employment, housing, and services for which they may be eligible;

Our board recommends two areas as priorities:

1. Develop programs and resources that will highlight the benefits of and the process for applying for U.S. citizenship.
2. Develop a statewide language access plan with administrative oversight.

U.S. Citizenship Recommendations

- ONA should highlight the existing U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) Citizenship Resource Material on the ONA website and in any other related state agency websites or materials.
- ONA should explore working directly with the USCIS Office of Citizenship and Applicant Information Services to use their resources, and/or develop other resources specific to Virginia, to promote naturalization at community events, meetings, etc.
- Through Budgetary Action, provide funding to the Office of New Americans to develop programs that will promote naturalization, highlight, and utilize existing USCIS Office of Citizenship Resources and Application Services, and provide technical support to those applying for citizenship.

Language Access Recommendations

- The Office of New American Advisory Board recommends that the Virginia Governor empower the Office of Diversity, Opportunity and Inclusion to create and provide oversight of a statewide language access plan, in partnership with the Office of New Americans and the Office of New Americans Advisory Board, that would provide guidance and expectations for agency and department language access plans throughout the government of Virginia. The statewide language access plan would also include procurement policies and review of Code for provisions that would limit or restrain the implementation of a statewide language access plan. This would then be accompanied by legislative action for compliance provisions.
- The Office of New American Advisory Board recommends that adequate funding be provided to fully staff the Office of Diversity, Opportunity and Inclusion to oversee the compliance of agencies and departments within the statewide language access plan. The ODOI would also be tasked with the periodic review of the

statewide language access plan for compliance with federal guidelines and current best practices.

SUPPORT U.S. CITIZENSHIP

The civic and political integration of New Americans is curtailed if those eligible decide not to naturalize, which, among other benefits, allows them to vote and run for office. We know that economic integration is lower for non-citizens in Virginia compared to those adopting citizenship, but it is not known whether citizenship status alone confers this benefit or whether it is due to other personal characteristics.⁴⁴ The average income was much higher for households headed by naturalized citizens in 2022 (\$112,400) than for non-citizens (\$83,800). In addition, Virginia’s naturalized citizens had a poverty rate of 7.5 percent compared to 15.2 percent for non-citizens.

The National Academy of Sciences has reported that “naturalization rates in the United States lag behind other countries that receive substantial numbers of immigrants” and that “(t)his is surprising since the vast majority of immigrants, when surveyed, report wanting to become a U.S. citizen.”⁴⁵ There are approximately 280,000 lawful permanent residents (“green-card holders” or immigrants) in Virginia as of 2023, and 180,000, or about 2 out of 3 are eligible to naturalize. This statistic demonstrates that there is a substantial number of VA immigrants who likely want to naturalize.

ONA’s authorizing code states that ONA shall provide advice and assistance to new Americans regarding (i) the citizenship application process and (ii) securing employment, housing, and services for which such persons may be eligible. The Board agrees that it is vital that Virginia provide citizenship application assistance to these 190,000 residents so that they can potentially apply to have all the rights and responsibilities, as native-born Virginians. We concur that ONA should work towards providing assistance on employment and housing, but we believe there is a special opportunity to provide citizenship assistance by working in collaboration with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS),

USCIS, the federal agency responsible for citizenship applications, already has a comprehensive website, the Citizenship Resource Center⁴⁶, with a collection of helpful resources and free study materials for a variety of users including:

- Immigrants who are interested in becoming U.S. citizens. Lawful permanent residents (LPRs) will find information about the naturalization process, eligibility requirements, and study materials to prepare for the naturalization interview and test.
- Educators who play a critical role in preparing learners. Educators including teachers, volunteers, and program administrators will find several resources for the classroom. Educators can also search for free USCIS training seminars designed to enhance the skills needed to teach U.S. history, civics, and the naturalization process to immigrant students.

⁴⁴ Sumption, Madeleine and Sarah Flamm. 2012. The Economic Value of Citizenship for Immigrants in the United States. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute. [The Economic Value of Citizenship for Immigrants in the United States \(migrationpolicy.org\)](https://www.migrationpolicy.org/publications/economic-value-citizenship-immigrants-united-states)

⁴⁵ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2015. [The Integration of Immigrants into American Society](https://www.nationalacademies.org/2015/04/the-integration-of-immigrants-into-american-society). Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. doi: 10.17226/21746, page 11.

⁴⁶ [Citizenship Resource Center | USCIS](https://uscis.gov/citizenship-resource-center)

- Organizations that are interested in supporting immigrants in becoming citizens and assisting them to integrate into American civic society. Whether an organization is just beginning to help immigrants on their journey towards citizenship or is an experienced service provider, they will find resources to help enhance their overall efforts and programs.

The study materials and resources are available in languages other than English including Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese. USCIS also has an on-line guide for New Americans to help them integrate to life in the United States (See [Settling in the U.S. | USCIS](#)⁴⁷). The material offers helpful information about education, child care, employment, what to do in case of an emergency, and a number of popular topics that will help new immigrants settle in the U.S.

SUPPORT A STATEWIDE LANGUAGE ACCESS PLAN

The authorizing code for the Office of New American Advisory Board states:

The purpose of the 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.

In our earlier reports, ONAAB noted that limited English proficiency is one of the key barriers for the successful economic and civic integration of New Americans into the Commonwealth. There are more than 1 million foreign born individuals in the Commonwealth and these linguistic and cultural barriers impact practically every aspect of the New American experience.

Our assessment is that there are three primary reasons why there is a need for enhanced and more effective linguistic integration of New Americans through a comprehensive state language access plan.

- Legal and compliance
- Moral and ethical
- Economic opportunity

Legal and Compliance - In our system of government, many state and local services depend upon federal grants to provide services and resources. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 ensures the right to language access for individuals with limited English Proficiency (LEP) [Civil Rights Act of 1964⁴⁸, Public Law 88-352, U.S. Statutes at Large 78 (1964)]. Additionally, Executive Order 13166 of August 11, 2000, Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited Proficiency [The President and U.S. Department of Justice, “Executive Order 13166-Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency⁴⁹,” Federal Register 65, no. 159, August 16, 2000] - expands and ensures meaningful access to federally funded services and resources.

The order “requires Federal agencies to examine the services they provide, identify any need for services to those with limited English proficiency (LEP), and develop and implement a system to provide those services so LEP persons

⁴⁷ [Settling in the U.S. | USCIS](#)

⁴⁸ [Civil Rights Act \(1964\) | National Archives](#)

⁴⁹ [Civil Rights Division | Executive Order 13166 \(justice.gov\)](#)

can have meaningful access to them. It is expected that agency plans will provide for such meaningful access consistent with, and without unduly burdening, the fundamental mission of the agency. The Executive Order also requires that the Federal agencies work to ensure that recipients of Federal financial assistance provide meaningful access to their LEP applicants and beneficiaries.”

Additional guidance has been released in the form of the “Memorandum for Heads of Federal Agencies, Heads of Civil Rights Offices and General Counsels,” [United States Attorney General and Department of Justice, “Memorandum for Heads of Federal Agencies, Heads of Civil Rights Offices and General Counsels⁵⁰,” November 21, 2022] published by Attorney General Merrick Garland on November 21, 2022. In the memorandum, this guidance for Executive Order 13166 states:

“ the Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights will work collaboratively with agencies to help determine: (i) whether agencies can further update their language access policies and plans; (ii) whether agencies are effectively reaching individuals with limited English proficiency when disseminating information about federal resources, programs, and services; (iii) whether agencies have considered updates or modifications to guidance to federal financial assistance recipients regarding their obligations to provide meaningful language access under the requirements of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its implementing regulations; and (iv) whether agencies can adapt their digital communications to welcome individuals with limited English proficiency.”

This renewed focus on addressing linguistic barriers for LEP individuals has prompted federal agencies to review and assess not only their own language access plans, but also the language access provisions and plans of the state agencies and departments that receive funds granted by those federal agencies. As a result, the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) has received inquiries into its language access plans. It should be noted that the VDSS does not currently have a language access plan however, plans are in place for the hiring of a language access coordinator to address language access opportunities at the VDSS.

At this time, the ONAAB is unaware of any other Commonwealth agencies or departments who have received similar inquiries, however we are certain that this may soon change. According to the Virginia Department of Planning and Budget, federal grants are the largest source of non general fund revenue and comprises roughly 40% of our biennial budget [Virginia Department of Planning and Budget, 2020 Appropriation Act. (Chapter 56, 2020 Special Session I, Acts of Assembly)] . These grants help finance a broad range of services, including health care, education, social services, infrastructure, and public safety. Therefore we can assume state agencies that receive federal funds in those areas will be asked to review their language access plans.

Moral and Ethical - From the early infancy of the United States of America (USA), throughout its history, and to the present day, the USA has stood forth as the land of opportunity. And upon the talent and contributions of the many generations of immigrants and New Americans, that belief has held true. The world’s “huddled masses” have been reborn as Americans and have uplifted the United States as a global leader. This promise was enshrined in the very founding documents that still inspire and govern us today, the Declaration of Independence, our Constitution and the Bill of Rights contained within. These fundamental rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness continue to be the basis for our nation and system of government.

⁵⁰ [Attorney General Memorandum - Strengthening the Federal Government's Commitment to Language Access \(justice.gov\)](https://www.justice.gov/opa/attorney-general-memorandum-strengthening-the-federal-governments-commitment-to-language-access)
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For New Americans, limited English proficiency may pose serious obstacles to integrating into American life and the pursuit of the American Dream. When these individuals do not have the same access to resources, services, and information that other Americans enjoy, that creates a moral and ethical issue.

The Commonwealth has the 10th largest New American population in the country [Migration Policy Institute (MPI) tabulation of data from U.S. Census Bureau⁵¹, 2010 and 2021 American Community Surveys (ACS), and 1990 and 2000 Decennial Census]. With 1.16 million New Americans, this constitutes roughly 13.3% of the Commonwealth's population. This is a significant portion of the Commonwealth's population that will be prevented from advancing their futures to the benefit of the Commonwealth and Nation. This presents not only the aforementioned moral and ethical dilemma, but more importantly an economic one.

Economic Opportunity - In the previous sections of this report, we have noted that the New American population represents significant workforce and economic contributions to the Commonwealth. To best leverage this talent, we need to invest in the development of this talent. By developing and executing a language access plan that not only helps provide better access to resources and information, the Commonwealth can further develop our job ready workforce by promoting and supporting English language acquisition.

Many states have already created, or are creating, initiatives that enhance English language acquisition as a workforce development tool to attract and retain their international talent. Virginia would be wise to do the same. Some of these include:

- Washington State's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training⁵² (I-BEST) This program allows technical faculty and basic skills instructors to design and teach college-level occupational classes which increase the rate at which adult basic education and English as a Second Language learners advance on higher level learning and complete postsecondary credentials.
- Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity High Speed Internet Office's Digital Equity Plan⁵³ that addresses digital divide issues while also addressing limited English proficiency, workforce development and broadband connectivity.
- Colorado's SB 22-140 Expansion of Experiential Learning Opportunities⁵⁴. This bill addresses the labor shortage in Colorado through various initiatives including targeting the 20% of Coloradans that speak a language other than English at home. This addressing of language barriers through the alignment of education and employment will address immediate access to talent for employers.

As noted in the previous Economic Opportunity section, *"Leaders in these states have looked at their changing demographics, and have concluded that leveraging these growing New American populations will result in increased talent, skills and resources. These valuable elements can allow economies to better compete in the national and global market. Virginia must attract and retain New American talent."*

⁵¹ [Immigrant Population by State, 1990-Present | migrationpolicy.org](https://www.migrationpolicy.org/immigrant-population-by-state-1990-present)

⁵² [Integrated Basic Education Skills and Training \(I-BEST\) | SBCTC](https://www.sbctc.org/Integrated-Basic-Education-Skills-and-Training-(I-BEST)-|)

⁵³ <https://www.michigan.gov/leo/-/media/Project/Websites/leo/Documents/MIHI/DE-Plan---DRAFT.pdf>

⁵⁴ <https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/sb22-140>

The Need for a Virginia Statewide Language Access Plan

In the 2004 Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission of the Virginia General Assembly (JLARC) report *Acclimation of Virginia Foreign Born Populations*, it was noted that

“Under Title VI of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964, agencies in receipt of any amount of federal funding are required to ensure that persons with a limited command of English are not denied meaningful access to benefits and services as a result of their English abilities.”

This is true, however if we consider the value of New Americans as our workforce, innovators, international and cultural advisors, entrepreneurs, and economic drivers, it makes sense to look at addressing issues such as language access and cultural competencies as investments into these valuable assets. We need to understand that the engagement with these individuals are not a few years, but rather for generations as they grow, mature and become significant producers and assets to the Commonwealth. This development of a continuum of integration for Virginia’s workforce so they feel welcomed and flourish.

The previously mentioned 2004 JLARC report, along with the recommendations made in the VCU Study on Ensuring Language Access Equity in Virginia Government Services report from 2021, acknowledged that the Commonwealth does not have a comprehensive or coordinated state language access plan. Recommendations made in 2004 are still true today, and have not been implemented.

State Language Access Plan: Without a state language access plan, agencies and departments have developed individual plans of varying consistency and effectiveness. In the VCU Study, eight state agencies/departments had existing language plans; 4 had plans in progress and 6 had elements of language access plans. These are shown here.

Agencies with Existing Plans (8)	Agencies with Plans in Progress (4)	Agencies with Plan Elements (6)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Circuit Courts• Court of Appeals• Department of Medical Assistance Services• Department of Motor Vehicles• Judicial Inquiry and Review Commission• Supreme Court of Virginia• Virginia Department of Health• Virginia Department of Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Department of Corrections• Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation• Office of the Children’s Ombudsman	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired• Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing• Department of Education• Department of Elections• Department of Labor and Industry• Virginia Employment Commission

Source: Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs, Virginia Commonwealth University, “Ensuring Language Access Equity in Virginia, 12-3-21

This is of high concern as there are more than 100 state agencies/departments within the government of Virginia. A significant number of outward facing agencies, who work with the general public and New American

communities, do not have plans or even elements of a language access plan.

Even with the agencies that had existing plans, resources and efforts were inconsistent. Some agencies have documents translated into key languages, while others do not. Some agencies depend on telephonic language line resources for translation services while others employ bilingual staff. Some agencies look internally to develop their plans while others have contracted out to consulting firms.

Staff from these agencies do demonstrate a desire to address language and cultural competency issues. The Office of New Americans and Department of Social Services hosted a multi-stakeholder virtual roundtable on July 8, 2022. This event was titled “Developing a Framework for Language Access and Workforce Development Programs in Virginia” and included stakeholders from state and local agencies, resettlement agencies, health care organizations and other community-based organizations. The post event survey showed that:

- 73% of survey respondents agreed that Language Access was very important to their operations.
- 60% of survey respondents agreed that Workforce Development was important.
- 80% of survey respondents indicated that they would like to incorporate more language access resources into their work.

However, even though staff recognize the importance of Language Access and feel that they would like to incorporate more language access resources, they have not embraced opportunities to do so. In the previous budget for fiscal year 2023 and fiscal year 2024, \$5 million dollars was budgeted for addressing language access issues. FY 2023 funds in the amount of \$2.5 million largely went unused and FY 2024 funds (\$2.5 million) are still available. This is of high concern for the ONAAB. Given that there has been a stated need for these funds, our agencies are unsure of how to utilize these funds, were unaware that the funding was available, or had no motivation to address language access concerns.

If we had a statewide language access plan, with specific agency responsibilities and key administrative guidelines (and high level agency and Administration support), these agencies and departments would have better guidance and accountability towards the development and intentional execution of agency/department-wide language access plans. The importance of a state-wide language access plan with executive level oversight is highlighted in a letter that was co-authored by the Chairs of the Virginia Office of New Americans Advisory Board, Virginia Asian Advisory Board, and the Virginia Latino Advisory Board. This letter was written and submitted to the Governor on January 17, 2023, and will be submitted with this report as an addendum(B).

The Office of New American Advisory Board recommends that the Virginia Governor empower the Office of Diversity, Opportunity and Inclusion to create and provide oversight of a statewide language access plan, in partnership with the Office of New Americans and the Office of New Americans Advisory Board, that would provide guidance and expectations for agency and department language access plans throughout the government of Virginia. The state language access plan would also include procurement policies and review of Code for provisions that would limit or restrain the implementation of state language access plan. This would then be accompanied by legislative action for compliance provisions.

OVERSIGHT OF A STATE LANGUAGE ACCESS PLAN

In both the JLARC study and the VCU study, there was a strong acknowledgement that a cabinet level oversight

body be empowered to guidance and assistance to state and local agencies as well as limited English proficiency constituents to address language accessibility issues. This is incredibly important to provide consistency and overall quality of language access and cultural competency initiatives.

In the VCU study, it was recommended that this responsibility fall under the Governor's Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, which has since been reauthorized as the Governor's Office of Diversity, Opportunity and Inclusion (ODOI). The ONAAB highly supports this proposed oversight structure as it places the responsibility of such oversight directly under the Governor's Executive team and provides appropriate importance to the issues within this arena.

However, the ODOI is currently understaffed as it counts only one staff member, Deputy Chief Officer Michael Perez outside of the Chief Diversity Officer Martin Brown. The office is charged with the role of promoting ideas, policies, and economic opportunities for all Virginians. To add these additional responsibilities to oversee the state language access plan would require additional staffing to help create, support, and enforce the provisions of the plan.

The ONAAB would embrace the opportunity to assist in the development and review of a state language access plan. As individuals who work closely with communities often confronted with language access and cultural barriers to public resources and services, we are uniquely qualified to provide input into a comprehensive and consistent plan for the Commonwealth.

The Office of New American Advisory Board recommends that adequate funding be provided to fully staff the Office of Diversity, Opportunity and Inclusion to oversee the compliance of agencies and departments within the state language access plan. The ODOI would also be tasked with the periodic review of the state language access plan for compliance with federal guidelines and current best practices.

OFFICE OF NEW AMERICANS ADVISORY BOARD RECOMMENDATIONS

Amend the Code to allow for more meetings per year. [Legislative] Current code limits meetings of the Board to four per year. Allowing for more meetings will assist with more collaborative and focused engagement of the Board and Committees. This would also make the operational limitations of the Board consistent with the Code that governs the other advisory boards. Virginia Asian Advisory Board §2.2-2449, Virginia African American Advisory Board §2.2-2492, Virginia Council on Women §2.2-2630, and Virginia Latino Advisory Board §2.2-2459.

Amend the Code to raise the number of appointed non legislative citizen Board members to twenty-one. [Legislative] This would be consistent with the other advisory boards which have 21 appointed citizen board members. This would also allow for more subject matter expertise and engagement in our committee work. Virginia Asian Advisory Board §2.2-2449, Virginia African American Advisory Board §2.2-2492, Virginia Council on Women §2.2-2630, and Virginia Latino Advisory Board §2.2-2459.

Amend the Code to include additional ex-officio members to the Board. [Legislative] The current ex-officio members include the Director of the Office of Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion, and the Chairs of the Virginia Asian Advisory Board (VAAB), Virginia African American Advisory Board (VAAAB), Virginia Council on Women (VCW) and Virginia Latino Advisory Board (VLAB). These are welcome additions to the Board. However, like the other advisory boards, the work of the Board involves a multitude of considerations in multiple agencies across multiple secretariats. The other advisory boards have representatives from relevant secretariats represented as ex-officio members. Virginia Asian Advisory Board §2.2-2449, Virginia African American Advisory Board §2.2-2492, Virginia Council on Women §2.2-2630, and the Virginia Latino Advisory Board §2.2-2459.

Current Ex-Officio Member Assignments

VAAB	VAAAB	VCW	VLAB
Commerce & Trade	Commerce & Trade	Appointed by Governor	Commerce & Trade
Commonwealth	Commonwealth		Commonwealth
Education	Education		Education
Health and Human Resources	Health and Human Resources		Health and Human Resources
Public Safety and Homeland Security	Public Safety and Homeland Security		Public Safety and Homeland Security
			Transportation

As the responsibilities of the Board also involve work with agencies under specific secretariats, it is recommended that the code be amended to include ex-officio members representing:

- Commerce and Trade
- Education
- Health and Human Resources
- Labor

- Public Safety and Homeland Security
- Transportation

ONAAB RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE OFFICE OF NEW AMERICANS

Provide funding to commission a new JLARC study to assess the integration of New Americans in the Commonwealth and update the findings from the 2004 report. [Legislative] The 2004 JLARC study “Acclimation of Virginia’s Foreign-Born Population” provided the first snapshot of the foreign-born population and their adjustment to life in Virginia. The immigrant populations have almost doubled since the initial report was released in 2004. Additionally, the countries of origin of these newcomers are much more diverse and have added more complexities to the conversations around language access and cultural appropriateness of services and resources. We also have more multigenerational considerations regarding the New American populations as more immigrants and refugees make their homes in the Commonwealth.

A new JLARC study is incredibly important to developing the full scope of the ONA and connectivity with other agencies in the Administration. Additionally, while we recognize and appreciate that the VCU Needs Assessment Survey fills in some important gaps in data about New Americans in the Commonwealth today, our Board also recognizes that JLARC studies are the gold-standard for Virginia policymaking.

Enhance the Office of New Americans budget to address expanded and unmet needs. [Administrative, Budgetary, Legislative] Building a robust office of New Americans is essential in order to take advantage of the social and economic benefits New Americans bring to the Commonwealth. The Office of New Americans currently includes two staff under the direction of Director Seyoum Berhe. Increased funding will allow the office to continue to build capacity through hiring more staff, building a stronger administrative and programmatic infrastructure, and seeking funding to support programs that will benefit the integration of all New American communities across the Commonwealth.

Per the authorizing code outlined on page 8, the Office shall:

1. *Implement a statewide strategy to promote the economic, linguistic, and civic integration of New Americans in the Commonwealth;*
2. *Work with localities to coordinate and support local efforts that align with the statewide strategy to promote the economic, linguistic, and civic integration of New Americans in the Commonwealth;*
3. *Provide advice and assistance to New Americans regarding (i) the citizenship application process and (ii) securing employment, housing, and services for which such persons may be eligible;*
4. *Provide advice and assistance to state agencies regarding (i) the coordination of relevant policies across state agencies responsible for education, workforce, and training programs, including professional licensure guidance, small business development, worker protection, refugee resettlement, citizenship and voter education or engagement programs, housing programs, and other related programs, and (ii) the dissemination of information to localities and immigration service organizations regarding state programs that help New Americans find and secure employment, housing, and services for which they may be eligible;*
5. *Educate localities and immigration service organizations on health epidemics and unlawful predatory actions, such as human trafficking, gang recruitment, and fraudulent financial and other schemes, to which communities of such persons may be especially vulnerable;*
6. *Serve as the primary liaison with external stakeholders, particularly immigrant-serving and refugee serving organizations and businesses, on immigrant integration priorities and policies;* 7. *Partner with state agencies and immigrant-serving and refugee-serving organizations and businesses to identify and disseminate beneficial immigrant integration policies and practices throughout the Commonwealth;*

7. *Manage competitive grant programs that replicate beneficial practices or test new innovations that improve the effectiveness and efficacy of immigrant integration strategies; and*
8. *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.*

As noted earlier in the report, there are more than one million foreign born individuals living in the Commonwealth, roughly thirteen percent of the entire population of the state. Based upon the priorities outlined in the code, the ONA needs to increase capacities and resources to address these mandates.

As the ONA continues developing its strategic plan, the most immediate needs to support the necessary work would be to increase support to address unmet needs. The Board recommends the following:

Increase budget to enhance staffing to address issues affecting immigrant issues (\$2 million). The Office of New Americans needs additional capacity and personnel to address critical issues for all New Americans. The expected outlays would allow hiring of 3 Full Time Employees to work specifically on the following issues impacting New Americans.

- Orientation in the United States and to Virginia as a foundation of integration
- Job readiness training and placement
- Health information
- Language Access
- Education
- Citizenship education

Increase budget to create five regional staff positions (\$500,000 salary and benefits) This increase in staff capacity would create positions in the following regions:

- Northern Region
- Central Region
- Hampton Road and Eastern Region
- Southern and Southwest Regions
- Valley Region

Each staff member would work closely with existing Department of Social Services offices and nonprofit agencies, resettlement agencies, educational institutions, localities and other community partners in facilitating collaboration and ensuring that New Americans' needs are addressed. Additionally, the staff would:

- Provide technical support that includes training for funded and other immigrant serving agencies or organizations.
- Serve as navigators for New Americans and New American serving organizations regarding state services, links and resources.
- Conduct annual monitoring of funded agencies to provide oversight of contracted services.
- Identify and report opportunities and challenges in each region to ONA and state leadership.
- Report on activities and achievements in each region to ONA and state leadership.

Increase budget of the Office of New Americans to support the work of the Office of New Americans Advisory Board per code. (\$63,000) In the 2021-2022 budget, the ONA's budget included \$30,000 for expenses in support of the work of the Board. This provision is noted in the final engrossed impact statement.²⁶

Assuming the Board meets the maximum number of times prescribed by the bill (four times annually), annual expenses for all 18 members and five ex officio members are estimated to be \$30,000, based on updated travel costs for similar boards. These expenses include mileage, lodging, meals, and incidentals. DSS employees will likely incur travel costs, as well, since the bill requires the agency to provide staff support to the Board. Annual DSS staff travel expenses are estimated at \$2,600 for a maximum of four meetings a year. Actual travel costs will depend on the number of times the Board actually meets.

As the Board is requesting a change to the meeting limitation and is expected to host six meetings per year, the budgeted costs for meetings and staff support should be increased 50% to \$45,000. It should also be noted that the staff travel expenses would also increase by roughly 50% to \$3,900.

In addition, the Board plans to host town halls and focus groups in the furtherance of its work. The costs to host town halls would be estimated to be \$4,500 per event to include facility rental, refreshments, recording costs, equipment rental, security and incidentals. Travel costs would not need to be considered as these town halls are expected to be hosted in concert with scheduled general board meetings. The expectation is to host four town halls per year therefore the budgeted request would be \$18,000 per year.

Therefore, the total budgetary enhancement for 2023-2024 would be \$2,563,000 in addition to the current budget for the Office of New Americans. Budget year 2024-2025 would include a similar budget enhancement and may include additional requested funding as further services and resources are developed.

OFFICE OF NEW AMERICANS ADVISORY BOARD RECOMMENDATION INDEX

We have included these recommendations broken out into the types of actions that are needed.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Access to Services

Administrative

- Issue Executive Order on Honor Violence (p.20)
- Provide specific avenues for local literacy programs to gain access and utilize federal and state funding. (p.22)
- Encourage public/private partnerships that could fund English classes and address barriers. For example, large employers of New Americans could partner with a literacy agency to provide onsite English for their employees. (p.22)
- Dedicate one of the new Virginia Department of Education Lab schools to English Language Learning. (p.22)
- Facilitate transition from ESOL programs to institute of higher education by investing in Bridge Programs that address the English proficiency and college readiness needs of New Americans. (p.22)
- Provide accessible information about associate and trade-based programs with a direct tie to the labor market and ensure high-demand courses are made known and opened to diverse groups. (p.22)

Economic Opportunity

Administrative

- Establishment of economic forum (p.24)

Budgetary

- Through Budgetary action, provide funding to the Office of New Americans and the Department of Labor to study employment and educational history of New Americans to determine focus of career pathway programs, and New American capacity to fill employment gaps in the state. (p.25)
- Through Budgetary action, provide funding to the Office of New Americans, the Department of Labor, Virginia Economic Development Partnership, and the Department of Education to explore further opportunities to recruit New American talent and retain them through statewide employment initiatives. (p.25)
- Through Budgetary action, provide funding to the Office of New Americans and the Department of Labor to review licensing and certification criteria and develop, translate, and disseminate career pathway maps. (p.25)

Inter/Intra Governmental Affairs

Administrative

- ONA should highlight the existing U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) Citizenship Resource Material on the ONA website and in any other related state agency websites or materials. (p.30)
- ONA should explore working directly with the USCIS Office of Citizenship and Applicant Information Services to use their resources, and/or develop other resources specific to Virginia, to promote naturalization at community events, meetings, etc. (p.30)

Budgetary & Legislative

- Through Budgetary Action, provide funding to the Office of New Americans to develop programs that will promote naturalization, highlight, and utilize existing USCIS Office of Citizenship Resources and Application Services, and provide technical support to those applying for citizenship. (p.30)
- The Office of New American Advisory Board recommends that the Virginia Governor empower the Office of Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion to create and provide oversight of a state language access plan, in partnership with the Office of New Americans and the Office of New Americans Advisory Board, that would provide guidance and expectations for agency and department language access plans throughout the government of Virginia. The state language access plan would also include procurement policies and review of Code for provisions that would limit or restrain the implementation of a state language access plan. This would then be accompanied by legislative action for compliance provisions. (p.30)
- The Office of New American Advisory Board recommends that adequate funding be provided to fully staff the Office of Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion to oversee the compliance of agencies and departments within the state language access plan. The ODOI would also be tasked with the periodic review of the state language access plan for compliance with federal guidelines and current best practices. (p.30)

GENERAL BOARD RECOMMENDATIONS

Budgetary

- Enhance the Office of New Americans budget to address expanded and unmet needs. (p. 39)

Legislative

- Amend the Code to allow for more meetings per year. (p. 38)
- Amend the Code to raise the number of appointed non legislative citizen Board members to twenty-one.(p. 38)
- Amend the Code to include additional ex-officio members to the Board. (p. 38)
- Amend the Code governing Freedom of Information Act to allow all subcommittee meetings to be electronic as defined by Code §2.2-2100. (p. 39)
- Commission a new JLARC study to assess the integration of New Americans in the Commonwealth and update the findings from the 2004 report. (p. 39)
- Enhance the Office of New Americans budget to address expanded and unmet needs. (p. 39-40)

CONCLUSION

The Office of New Americans Advisory Board wishes to thank Governor Glenn Youngkin, the Office of the Governor, our General Assembly members, the Cabinet Secretaries and their offices, the many agencies within the Administration, Chief Diversity, Opportunity and Inclusion Officer Martin Brown, Commissioner of the Department of Social Services James Williams, Director of the Office of New Americans Seyoum Berhe, and DSS and ONA leadership and staff for their support of the Board. We would also like to recognize the administration's focus on the integration of New Americans as valuable contributors to the economic development of the Commonwealth.

The Board has embraced this vision of a workforce development oriented Commonwealth and is dedicated to the development of an agency and system that will address the multifaceted needs and opportunities confronted by and presented through these newcomers. We continue to emphasize that these individuals and communities present an incredible opportunity for innovation, global competitiveness, and positive economic impacts for Virginia and the nation.

We look forward to leveraging our experience, knowledge, networks, and connectivity to the aspiring and New American communities to make Virginia a recognized leader in opportunity and inclusivity.

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