



**Commonwealth of Virginia**  
Office of Governor Glenn A. Youngkin



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

**Annual Report 2024-2025**

**October 1st, 2025**

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 prosperity<sup>1</sup>. ”*

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.

<sup>1</sup> American Immigration Council, [New Report Reveals Immigrant Roots of Fortune 500 Companies](#)  
2024-2025 Office of New Americans Advisory Board Report - October 2025

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 revisited many of the previous recommendations and have concluded that they are still timely and pertinent to the New American population. Thus, you will notice some recurring inputs from previous reports. 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.

## 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 1.19 million individuals or roughly 13.5% of the total state population.<sup>2</sup> This fast-growing segment of Virginia’s overall population ranks as the 10<sup>th</sup> largest immigrant population in the nation.<sup>3</sup>

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 has 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)

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2024, ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Table S0501

<sup>3</sup> 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**

#### **Legislative Recommendation - Prohibiting Honor-based Violence in the Commonwealth of Virginia**

##### **Legal Clarity and Accountability**

- Naming honor-based violence in legislation ensures courts and law enforcement cannot minimize or misinterpret these crimes as “cultural misunderstandings.”
- Establishing clear felony classifications (Class 1–3 depending on severity) strengthens accountability for perpetrators.
- Each violation is treated as a distinct felony, reinforcing the seriousness of the crime.

##### **Comprehensive Protections for Victims**

- Victims can pursue civil remedies for compensatory and punitive damages against perpetrators.
- Families of deceased victims may also seek damages, extending justice beyond criminal punishment.
- The law recognizes harm beyond just physical injury, including emotional, social, and financial harm.

##### **Prevention of Exploitation and Coercion**

- The bill explicitly defines and prohibits a wide range of exploitative practices, such as:
- Forced marriage, cousin marriage, marriage brokers, and deceptive marriage practices.
- Grooming, dowry-related coercion, cultural or religious abuse, and restrictions on education, work, or communication.
- Fraud (e.g., visa/document fraud/financial) and trafficking (sex, labor, organ, familial, or indentured servitude).
- These definitions close legal loopholes that perpetrators might otherwise exploit.

##### **Protection of Individual Rights**

- Sends a strong message that honor-based violence has no legal or cultural justification in Virginia or the U.S.
- It recognizes non-physical forms of control (financial restriction, social isolation, manipulation) as equally harmful.
- Broader Social Impact
- The law safeguards freedom of choice, mobility, communication, education, and employment—rights often targeted in honor-based abuse.
- Builds awareness of the unique barriers New Americans may face within family and community structures.
- Supports the goal of promoting safety, integration, and equality for immigrant and refugee communities.
- Supports self-determination and empowerment for all women in the Commonwealth

##### **Education**

- 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<sup>4</sup> 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.

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<sup>4</sup> Virginia Department of Education, [Laboratory Schools Frequently Asked Questions](#)

- 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.

#### STEAM Education Access for New American Children

- Expand access to STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) education for New American children—especially girls—by addressing logistical, and economic barriers such as after-school restrictions, lack of transportation, and limited school engagement in STEAM.
- Create a pipeline to STEAM success through free or low-cost access to summer STEAM camps, virtual learning, high school internships, and for-credit college-level STEAM courses, with options for both in-person and online participation.
- Emulate Arizona State University's inclusive model to boost college enrollment, workforce readiness, and economic growth, ultimately strengthening Virginia's competitiveness in the tech and innovation sectors.

### ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Centralized Resource Database for New Americans

- To improve access to existing state and non-profit services by consolidating them into a user-friendly, centralized platform. This will help New Americans navigate available resources more effectively and support their long-term economic mobility and integration.
- Key Features: The database will include services related to employment, education, healthcare, financial empowerment, digital access, small business support, credential recognition, and language access. It will be searchable by category, region, and eligibility.
- The database could be housed on the Office of New Americans website or integrated into the Department of Social Services platform to ensure visibility and institutional support. It will begin as a structured spreadsheet and evolve into an interactive web-based tool with map-based navigation and user submission options. Annual updates will ensure content remains current and relevant.
- Potential contributors and collaborators include state agencies, non-profit organizations, workforce development boards, educational institutions, and local service providers serving New American communities.

#### 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.
- 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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## 2024-2025 OFFICE OF NEW AMERICANS ADVISORY BOARD

### **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

Andrei Lipan, Chair - *Chesterfield*

Martha Cohen, Vice-Chair - *Henrico*

### **COMMITTEE & FOCUS LEADERSHIP**

Krishendo Ramsingh - Economic Opportunity Committee Chair - *Roanoke*

Sasha Taylor - Access to Services Committee Chair - *Alexandria*

Manoj Mathai - Inter/Intra Governmental Affairs Committee Chair - *Aldie*

### **CURRENT MEMBERS**

Sarah Basha, Access to Services Committee - *Leesburg*

Martha Cohen, Access to Services Committee - *Henrico*

Jacob DePeralta - *Annandale*

James Gordon, Access to Services Committee – *Halifax*

Yacoub Fakhri, Access to Services Committee - *Henrico*

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

Raba Letteri - *Reston*

Andrei Lipan - *Chesterfield*

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

Karina Martich, Economic Opportunity Committee - *Richmond*

Manoj Mathai, Inter/Intra Governmental Affairs Committee - *Aldie*

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

Cuong Nguyen, Economic Opportunity Committee - *Richmond*

Elizabeth Njuguna, Inter/Intra Governmental Affairs Committee - *Ashburn*

Krishendeo Ramsingh, Economic Opportunity Committee - *Roanoke*

Sasha Taylor, Access to Services Committee - *Alexandria*

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*

Michael Hoefer - *Alexandria*

Susannah Lepley – *Leesburg*

Dora Muhammad – *Triangle*

El Hadji Djibril Niang – *Richmond*

Ahoo Salem - *Roanoke*

Juan Santacoloma - *Chesterfield*

Eric-Michel Sossou-Gloh - *Alexandria*

Dr. Eva Stitt - *Norfolk*

Dr. Milton Vickerman - *Charlottesville*

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

Tori Mabry, Vice-Chair, Virginia African American Advisory Board

Cherry Dale, 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.

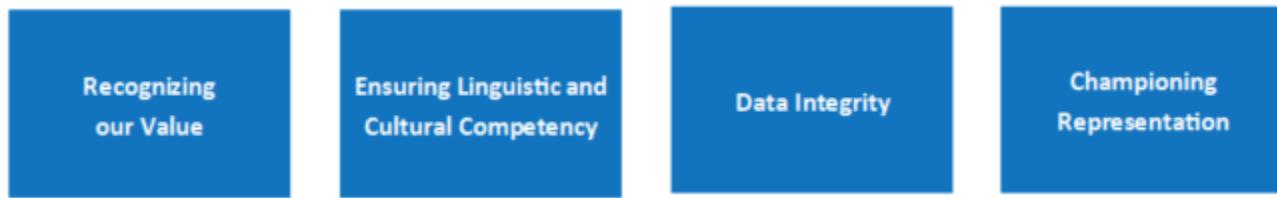
The Board has adopted the following Guiding Principles that help provide the overarching focus with regard to the work of the Board. These Guiding principles include:

**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:

- Sasha Taylor, Committee Chair
- Sarah Basha
- Martha Cohen
- Yacoub Fakhri
- James Gordon

**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:

- Krishendeo Ramsingh, Committee Chair
- Karina Martich
- Cuong Nguyen
- Zarmina Yusufi
- 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:

- Manoj Mathai, Committee Chair
- Elizabeth Njuguna
- Karina Lipsman
- Chris Mitchell

The Board also has no current dedicated **Language Access** leads in line with our Guiding Principle of **Ensuring Linguistic and Cultural Competence**. The lead seeks 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.

The Board also had two dedicated **Data Integrity** leads in line with our Guiding Principles of **Data Integrity**. These leads sought 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 Hoefer
- Dr. Milton Vickerman

## DATA ON NEW AMERICANS IN THE COMMONWEALTH

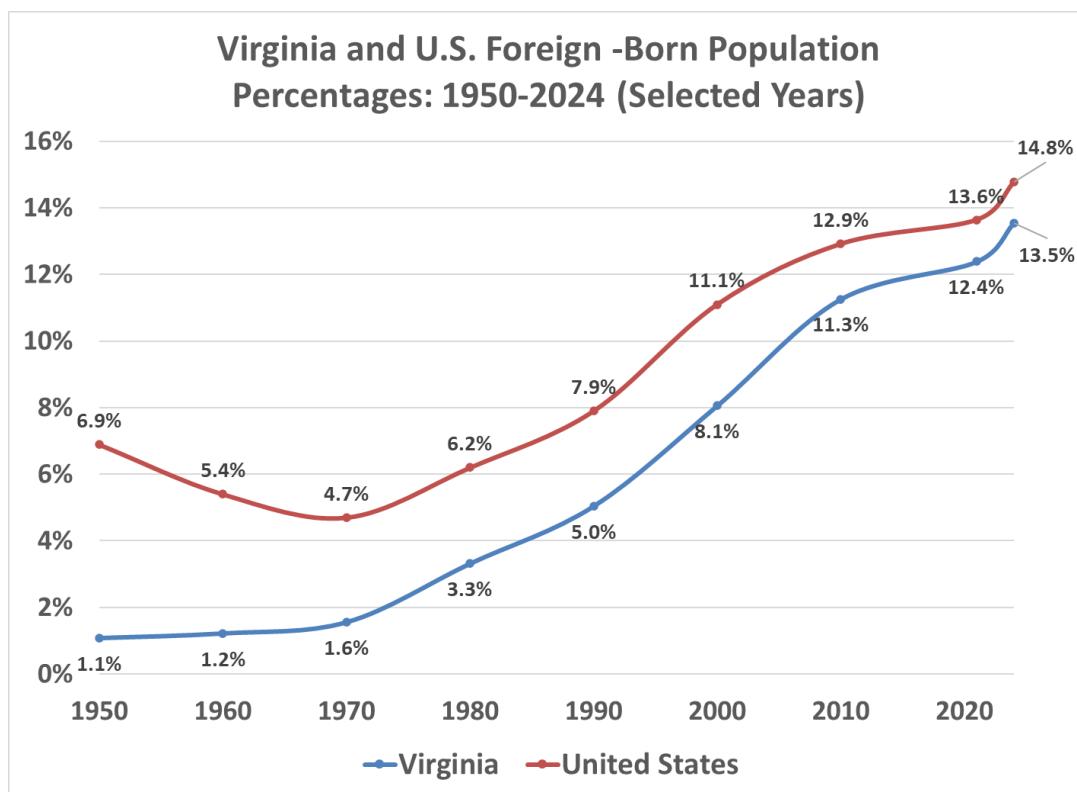
Our Board provided a comprehensive overview of Virginia's New American population in the 2020-2021 Annual Report titled **New Americans in the Commonwealth: Changing Demographics**. We have updated the main demographic data from that report in this section and provided pertinent data from **Barriers 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: 2024-2025 ANNUAL REPORT**

#### ***Population Change***

Virginia's total population more than doubled between 1960 (4.0 million) and 2024 (8.8 million), while the number of foreign-born persons in Virginia increased twenty-five 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 1.19 million in 2024, the latest data available.<sup>5</sup>

**Figure 1.**



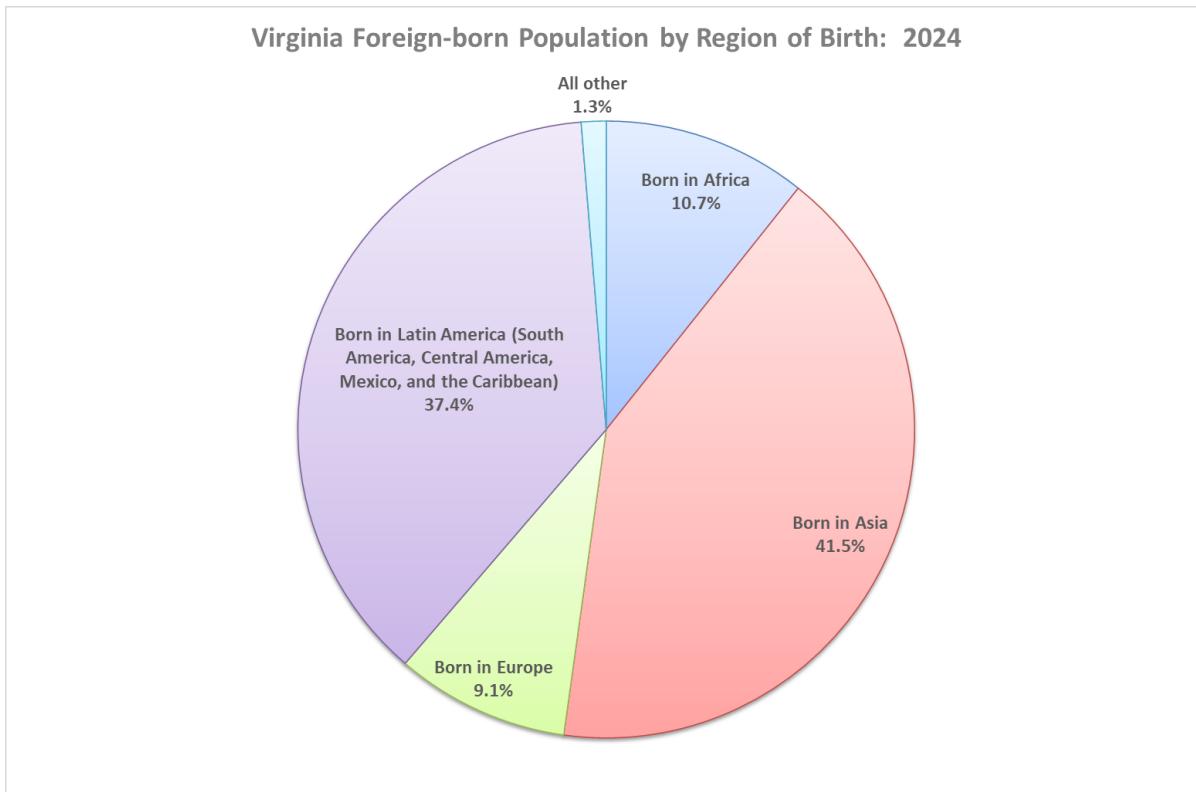
Sources: *Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850 to 2000*, Working Paper Number **POP-WP081**; *The Foreign-Born Population in the U.S.*, U.S. Census Bureau, May 2012; *Virginia State Data Profile, 2019 1-year ACS compiled by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI)*, U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2024, Subject Table S0501.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2024, ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Table S0501.

Overall, Virginia's foreign-born population increased from 1.2% of total residents to 13.5% between 1960 and 2024 (see figure 1). Virginia was the 25<sup>th</sup> highest state in numbers of foreign-born persons in 1960 but has increased more rapidly than other states. It has the 10th largest foreign-born population as of 2024. By comparison, the percent foreign-born in the United States increased from 5.4 percent in 1960 to 14.8 percent in 2024.

In 2024 most of Virginia's foreign-born residents originated in Asia (41.5 percent) and Latin America (South American, Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean) (37.4 percent) (see Figure 2). Nearly eleven percent were born in Africa and 9 percent in Europe.

**Figure 2.**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2024, 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.<sup>6</sup> The number of Afghans gaining lawful permanent status in 2023 (4,310) more than doubled compared to 2022 (1,964). Note: the 2024 data was not made available during the writing of this report.

<sup>6</sup> [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."<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, the percentage of employed civilians in Virginia who were foreign born rose from 9.8 percent in 2000 to 17.5 percent in 2024, and it will continue to grow into the future (See Figure 3). Nearly 46 percent of the growth in the VA workforce between 2000 and 2024 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.<sup>8</sup> 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 2024**

Civilian labor force (age 16 and older)	Foreign Born	Total	% Foreign Born	Foreign Born	Total	% Foreign Born
<b>Population</b>	1,121,155	7,173,696	15.6%	523,188	5,532,460	9.5%
<b>Civilian labor force</b>	796,020	4,548,123	17.5%	346,595	3,562,712	9.7%
% in the civilian labor force	71.0%	63.3%		66.2%	64.4%	
<b>Civilian Employed Workers</b>	765,749	4,383,128	17.5%	332,866	3,410,706	9.8%

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2024, ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Table S0501, and DP03: Selected Economic Characteristics, and 2000 Census.*

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 (this data accounts for all family members within the household, not just couples) in Virginia in 2023 had \$64.8 billion in income, paid \$6.2 billion in state and local income taxes, and paid \$12.1 billion in federal taxes.<sup>9</sup> The median household income of foreign-born households (with earnings) in Virginia was \$138,738 in 2024, compared to \$124,748 for U.S.-born households.<sup>10</sup> 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: \$71,083 for foreign-born males vs. \$74,919 for native-born males, \$60,136 for foreign-born females vs. \$61,308 for native-born females.<sup>11</sup> The poverty rate for households headed by an immigrant was 8.3 percent in 2024 and the comparable percent for U.S.-born heads of households was 6.4.<sup>12</sup> Please note that the median income is based on all members

<sup>7</sup> 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.

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

<sup>9</sup> [American Immigration Council, State Fact Sheet, Immigrants in Virginia, Taxes and Spending Power](#)

<sup>10</sup> [S0501: Selected Characteristics of the Native and Foreign-born Populations - Census Bureau Table](#)

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

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

of the household in the foreign-born household as compared to the average native-born household that includes only two spouses.

New Americans also contribute to job growth due to their high rate of entrepreneurship. The American Immigration Council estimates that there are 91,100 immigrant entrepreneurs in Virginia as of 2023 with a total business income of \$3.1 billion. While immigrants are 17.5 percent of the total civilian workforce, they account for 24.0 percent of Virginia's entrepreneurs.<sup>13</sup>

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: 2024**

Occupations	Foreign-born	U.S. born
<b>Civilian Workers Age 16 and Older</b>	<b>765,782</b>	<b>3,616,107</b>
<b>% Civilian Workers Employed in</b>		
Management, business, science and arts occupations	<b>45.6%</b>	<b>50.2%</b>
Service occupations	<b>19.5%</b>	<b>14.5%</b>
Sales and office occupations	<b>12.9%</b>	<b>18.5%</b>
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	<b>10.7%</b>	<b>6.8%</b>
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	<b>9.6%</b>	<b>10.1%</b>

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 46 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 promoting their education and English language learning, providing culturally and linguistically accessible healthcare services, and streamlining career pathways.

<sup>13</sup> [American Immigration Council, State Fact Sheet, Immigrants in Virginia, Entrepreneurship,](#)  
2024-2025 Office of New Americans Advisory Board Report - October 2025

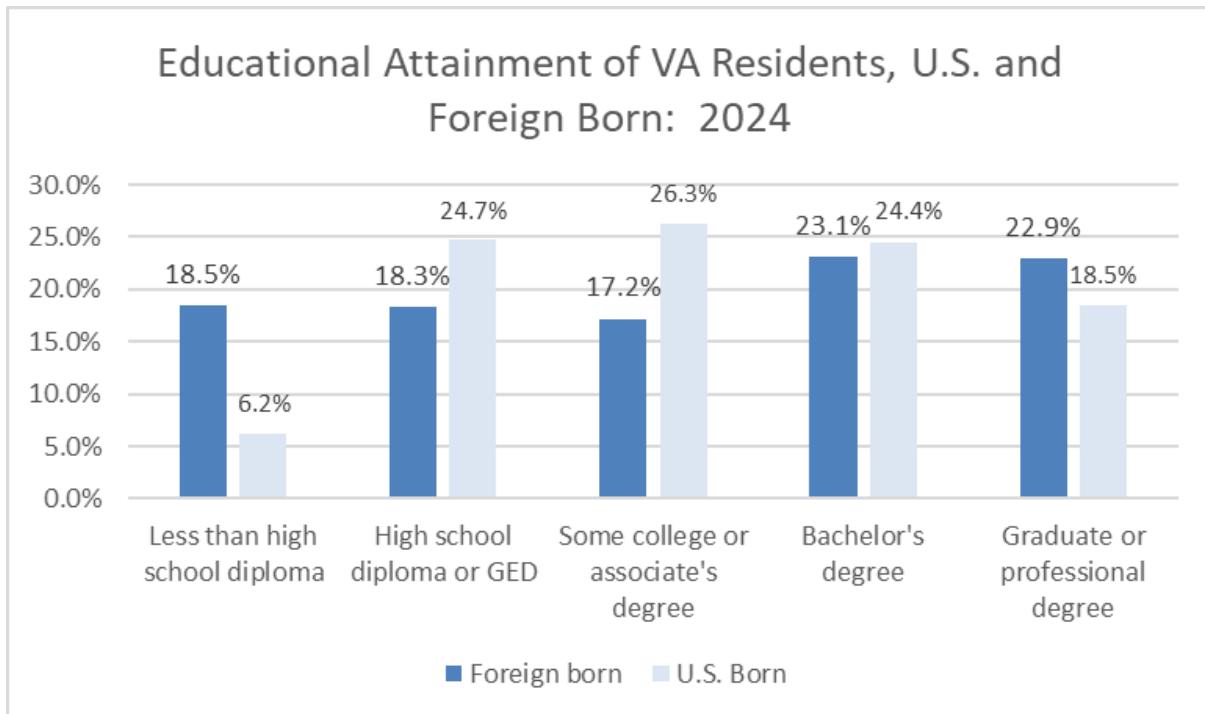
## ***Language Proficiency***

More than 38 percent of Virginia's foreign-born residents in 2023 were Limited English Proficient (LEP). About 17.5 percent report only speaking English at home and nearly 44.4 percent state that they speak English "very well."<sup>14</sup>

## ***Education***

Immigrants in Virginia as of 2024 exhibit a bimodal educational pattern, with 46.0 percent holding a college degree, but 18.5 percent failed to finish high school (see figure 5). An estimated 42.9 percent of Virginia's native-born population has a college degree, while only 6.2 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 had a college degree in 2023, the Migration Policy Institute reports that nearly 18 percent of these graduates are underutilized, i.e., they are unemployed or employed in low-skilled jobs compared to native born Virginians at 13 percent.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> [State Demographics Data Virginia 2022 | migrationpolicy.org](#)

<sup>15</sup> [State Demographics Data Virginia 2023 | migrationpolicy.org](#)

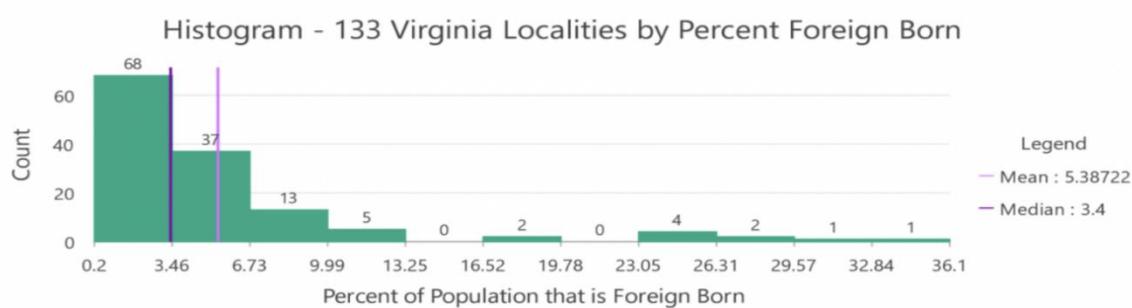
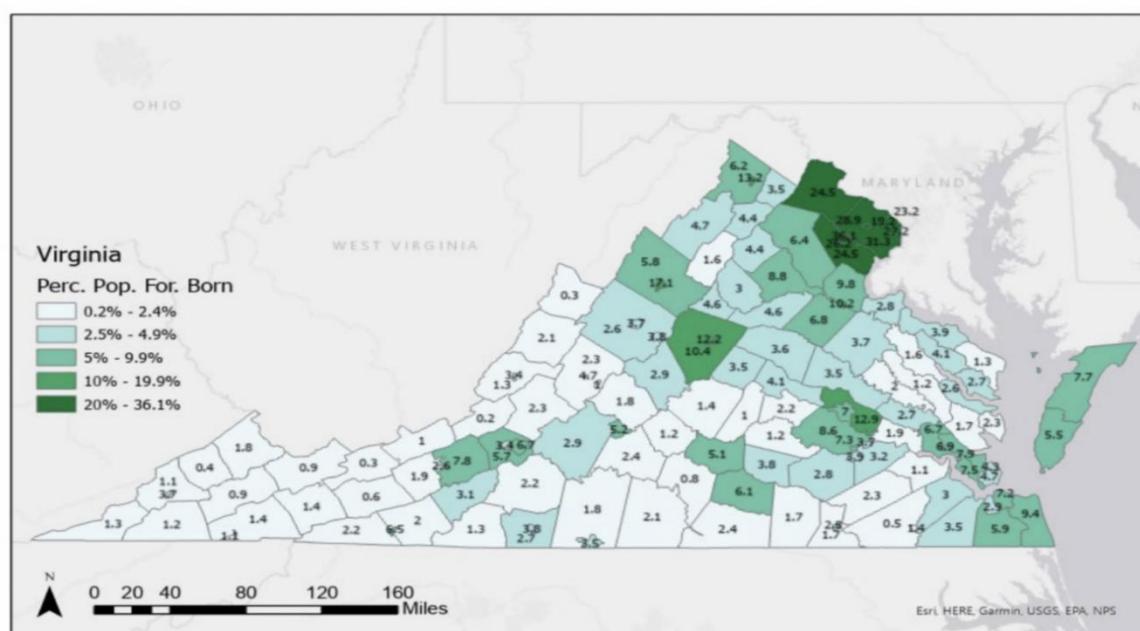
## Immigrant Population Distribution at the Local Level

About 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 2024-2025**

### **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 7, 2025 – Virtual Meeting
- April 10, 2025 – Richmond
- July 16, 2025 – Virtual Meeting
- October 1, 2025 – Henrico

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

- Tina Ramirez - Founder and President - Hardwired Global

### **BOARD MEMBER ENGAGEMENT**

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

- Mr. Lipan met with Heather Lynne and Ayanna McMullen from the 1717 Collective to discuss the business ecosystem in greater Richmond with an emphasis on New American business leaders.
- Mr. Lipan met with Ridge Schuyler to discuss Network2Work and how it has helped New Americans find jobs.
- Mr. Lipan attended the Welcoming Interactive Conference in Detroit, Michigan to learn more about the issues New Americans are facing as well as bring ideas for the board in order to enhance recommendations.
- Ms. Taylor attended the Anti-Trafficking in Person Summit on Capitol Hill which takes place in March and September and submitted a one-page briefing document entitled: "Making the Case for Honor-based Violence Prevention Act: How Preventing Violence Against New Americans (VANA) Households Benefits America." Mrs. Taylor endorsed the Take It Down Act, Trafficking Survivors Relief Act (TSRA), Combatting Trafficking in Transportation Act, Crime Victims Fund Stabilization Act, Frederick Douglass Trafficking Victims Protection Act, GRACIE Act, Human Trafficking and Exploitation Prevention Training Act, SHIELD Act, SOAR Act, Supporting Victims of Human Trafficking Act, and Child Marriage Prevention Act.
- Ms. Taylor presented Honor-based Violence training to the Cook County Human Trafficking Conference, Washington, D.C. Human Trafficking Task Force Policy & Legislation Subcommittee, and the Regional Interdisciplinary Collaborative (The RIC) Conference. Ms. Taylor also attends monthly meetings with The RIC and Virginia Coalition Against Human Trafficking.
- Ms. Taylor attended Women's History Month Webinar with First Lady of Virginia Suzanne Youngkin and attended the American Nepali Society (ANS) Meet & Greet monthly events, and volunteered with Lutheran Social Services by mentoring high school Afghan students who are also first-time college applicants.
- Ms. Taylor also provided an interview to a Canadian documentary filmmaker about child marriages in the United States.

### **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

## WORK WITH ONA

The Office of New Americans Advisory Board was given the responsibility of reporting on the Office of New Americans. At each meeting, an ONA staff member reports on the various happenings and focuses of the office.

This year, ONAAB members worked with ONA staff to identify businesses from their respective regions that need employees. ONAAB members expressed a desire to continue employment networking conversations between themselves, ONA, and the businesses in need.

Another focus between ONA and ONAAB is the creation of a welcoming orientation packet for both New Americans and Americans.

## 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.

#### Legislative Recommendation:

##### **Honor-based Violence**

United States-based cases of individuals harming or killing a family member due to “dishonor” has been documented now for decades, with perpetrators providing their justification to victims, witnesses, law enforcement, and in court. A law specifically listing honor-based violence and honor-based killing as illegal in Virginia will have a tremendous impact in the United States.

Suggested legislation for Honor-based violence and Honor-based killing language is included below:

- A. Any attempts to cause harm, serious injury, exploitation, coercion, deception, fraud, or trafficking to anyone on the basis of so-called honor will be subjected to a Class 3 Felony.
- B. Any attempts to cause serious injury with intent to maim or kill anyone on the basis of so-called honor will be subjected to a Class 2 Felony.
- C. Any attempts to murder anyone on the basis of so-called honor will be subjected to a Class 1 Felony.
- D. A victim may recover compensatory and punitive damages in a civil action from any person who has caused harm, serious injury, exploitation, coercion, deception, fraud, or trafficking.
- E. A victim’s kin may recover compensatory and punitive damages in a civil action from any person(s) who is responsible for the death of their family member in the name of honor.
- F. “Harm” includes social, or emotional, or physical, or financial, or any harm inflicted to the individual as a result of the individual exercising their freedom of choice, or anything not listed herein.

- G. "Exploitation" includes social, emotional, physical, financial, documents, childhood family marriage promises, cousin marriage, marriage broker, online marriage advertisement, or trafficking, or other forms of exploitation, not listed herein.
- H. "Coercion" also includes any form of grooming, social, emotional, physical, financial, cultural, historical, dowry, property, bride price, or any additional forms of coercion not listed herein. A. "Deception" also includes deceive, or manipulate, or lie, or gossip, or restrict movement, or restrict communication, or misrepresentation, or theft by deception, or defrauding, or evasion of liability, or counterfeit, or dishonesty, or use of family members, or use of friends, or pressure of community, or pressure of culture, or religious abuse, or any guise of a family vacation, or any attempts to restrict movement in a home, or any attempts to restrict travel alone, or any attempts to restrict communication in any form, or attempts to restrict communication with law enforcement, child protective services or social services, any attempt to restrict individual from gaining an education, any attempt of restricting an individual from exercising their right to work, any attempt of confiscating money or paycheck, or anything not listed herein.
- I. "Fraud" also includes visa fraud, documents fraud, and any fraudulent activities used to deceive a person into a forced marriage, or fraudulent situation, or any form of fraud not listed herein.
- J. "Trafficking" includes sex trafficking of a minor or adult, labor trafficking, and any form of modern-day indentured servitude or any other trafficking violation not listed or referenced herein.
- K. Any additional form of Honor-based Violence conducted not listed herein.
- L. Each violation of this section constitutes a separate and distinct felony.

As part of the goal of building awareness of specific barriers New Americans face and promoting solutions, the A2S Committee recommends proposing this legislative recommendation that would end Honor Violence.

### **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 2025, 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.

### **STEAM Education Access for New American Children**

In order to help children of New Americans, education has to be the key that lifts up the lives of New American children.

Virginia boasts phenomenal STEAM camps that would appeal to children of New American and their families and help them grow academically and carve a future of success for New American children to contribute back to Virginia's economy. It is *imperative to create an accessible pipeline for New American students to attend STEAM-affiliated summer camps* to achieve their secondary and high school STEAM education, and gain access to high school internships with reputable STEAM-affiliated companies to build upon their resumes to gain a competitive advantage in applying directly to Virginia colleges to achieve a STEAM-affiliated degree.

This also comes with the understanding that many New American children - *especially girls*, may not be allowed to participate in after school events because their families require them to come straight home after school and not deviate, thus limiting their chances of competing in after school sports or events. An additional factor is transportation logistics, with families not having access to a car or daily transportation and living within walking distance to their school. Virginia has existing programs that work to assist students.

A summer STEAM school program accessible to students through their school districts would provide educational opportunities to New American children. For this program to be successful, it would have to be *accessible* either in-person with transportation, or virtual with access to electronics -- *without additional financial cost or hindrance to families*. This accessibility model should also be offered during the summer in secondary school and into high school, to include college level for-credit STEAM classes, transitioning then into an in-person traditional college model throughout Virginia, into the traditional college sphere with students across racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds; across socioeconomic factors; and across the spectrum of previous academic achievement. By giving New American students greater access to consistent STEAM education starting early from junior high onwards into higher education, and then college, will advance our state, and in turn our country — economically, socially, and sustainably.

Arizona State University has already achieved this model and is currently thriving by accepting students regardless of grade, background, and ability into its college ranks. The number of students participating in their online courses has increased and the number of students applying to college and graduating and getting a job has increased. The state has attracted the technology industry, and by accepting students who want to go to

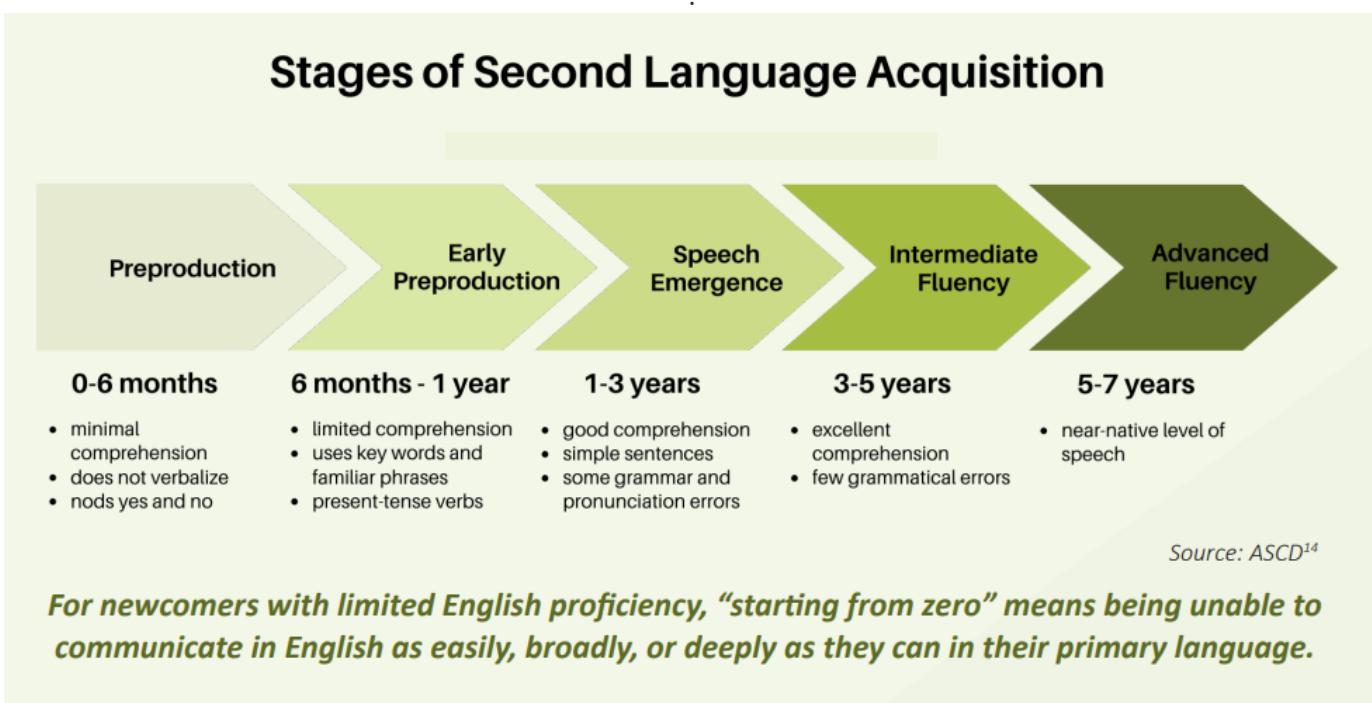
school the college has thrived, as has the state. Virginia can definitely learn from their model and implement their education model and access and start providing education to students and especially international students immediately; this can be an excellent source for Virginia's workforce development needs.

## **SUPPORT ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION**

A report published in 2022 about the integration outcomes of forcibly displaced persons<sup>16</sup> 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 fluency.<sup>17</sup>

**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.

<sup>16</sup> Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative, [Integration Outcomes for Forcibly Displaced Persons](#)

<sup>17</sup> Hill, 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,

New Americans are eager to learn English, but lack of accessible English classes make it difficult for them to attain 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
- 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 speakers.<sup>18</sup> 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 process.<sup>19</sup> Promote 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 mobility,<sup>20</sup> 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, racial, 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.

### **Centralized Resource Database for New Americans**

#### **Background:**

Many New Americans face significant challenges in accessing essential services that support their economic, social,

<sup>18</sup> 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](#).

<sup>19</sup> 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

<sup>20</sup> 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.

and physical well-being. While numerous state and non-profit programs exist to assist with employment, education, healthcare, and more, the lack of a centralized, user-friendly directory makes it difficult for individuals to locate and utilize these resources effectively. This gap hinders not only access but also long-term economic mobility.

**Proposal:**

We propose the creation of a centralized, publicly accessible database of services available to New Americans. This tool would consolidate information from state government agencies, non-profit organizations, and educational institutions that provide direct support aligned with workforce development and economic advancement.

**Platform & Accessibility:**

The database could be housed on the Office of New Americans website or integrated into the Department of Social Services platform to ensure visibility and institutional sustainability. To enhance usability, the platform should be searchable and filterable by category and region.

**Content & Scope:**

The database would include, but not be limited to, the following service categories:

**1. Employment Services**

- State-run job centers and workforce development boards
- Non-profit job placement programs
- Resume building, interview prep, and career counseling

**2. Education & Upskilling**

- Community college programs and adult education
- Vocational training, apprenticeships, and trade certifications
- ESL, GED, and digital literacy programs

**3. Healthcare Resources**

- Free and low-cost clinics
- Mental health services
- Navigation support for Medicaid and other health programs

**4. Language Access**

- Interpretation and translation services
- Bilingual service providers
- English language learning programs

**5. Entrepreneurship & Small Business Support**

- State Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs)
- Microloan programs and grant opportunities
- MWBE (Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprise) certifications
- Business planning and legal compliance assistance

**6. Credential Recognition & Workforce Licensing**

- Foreign credential evaluation services

- Pathways to re-licensing for international professionals (e.g., healthcare, teaching)
- State licensing board information
- Bridge programs for high-demand industries

## 7. Financial Empowerment Services

- State-sponsored financial literacy education
- Free tax preparation services (e.g., VITA)
- Credit-building resources and asset development programs
- Banking access initiatives

## 8. Digital Equity & Access

- Low-cost broadband and device assistance programs
- Digital skills training offered through state or local agencies
- Public computer access points and tech support

### **Maintenance & Sustainability:**

To ensure accuracy and relevance, the database should be reviewed and updated or reviewed annually.

### **Implementation:**

Initially, the database could be developed using a structured spreadsheet format with categories such as:

- Service Name
- Provider
- Contact Information
- Geographic Coverage
- Eligibility Requirements
- Languages Offered
- Government or Non-Profit Affiliation

Over time, the database can be migrated into a searchable, interactive web tool with map-based navigation and user submission features.

### **Conclusion:**

This centralized resource hub will support New Americans in navigating the complex ecosystem of public and private services, while also reinforcing state government goals around workforce participation, economic opportunity, and community integration. By investing in this database, the state will take a critical step toward improving integration, reducing redundancy in service delivery, and enabling long-term economic development for immigrant communities.

### **New American Economic Forum**

ONAAB is once again recommending that an economic forum for New Americans be created. Over these past four years, this administration has brought in many different businesses throughout the Commonwealth. We believe that such a forum would serve to not only spark a conversation, but also provide economic opportunities to both the businesses and New Americans that did not exist for them before. 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.

### **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 Virginia 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.

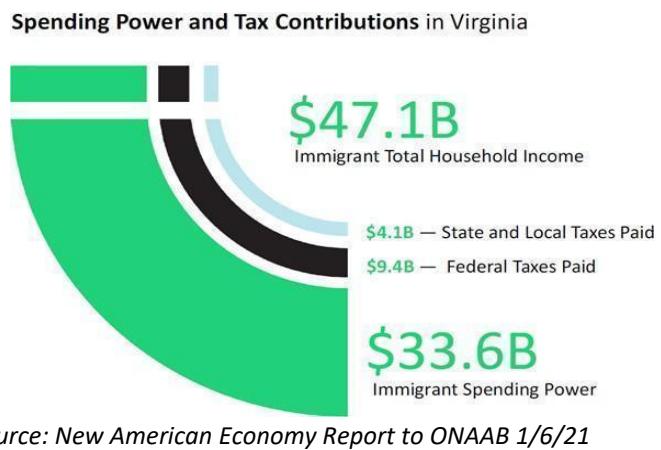
### **Workforce Development Recommendations**

- 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, nineteen states have also created Offices of New Americans or other offices to focus on successful immigrant integration. These states are California, Colorado, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Nevada, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Utah, Virginia, and Washington.<sup>21</sup>

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***

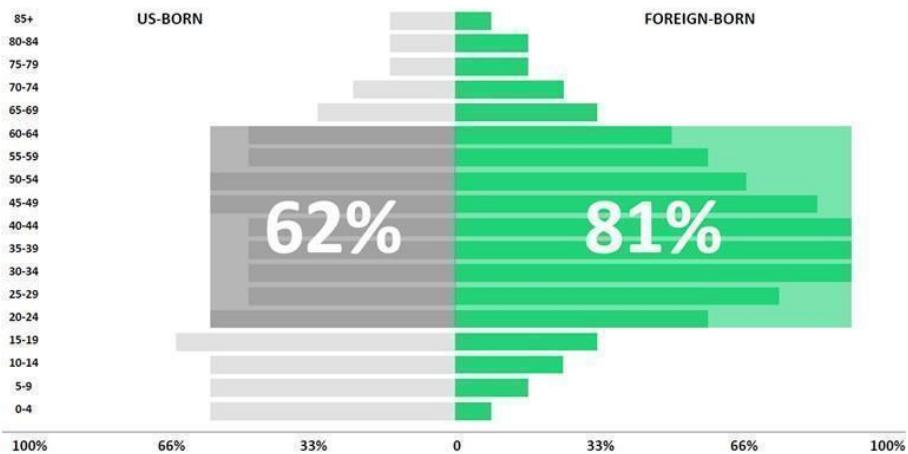
Since 2000, immigrant workers and their children have become the major contributors to our workforce growth.<sup>22</sup> The average age of the native-born population in the Commonwealth has steadily increased as the baby boomers have progressed towards retirement age. Figure 9 illustrates the demographic trends that make our New American workforce even more critical to sustained economic growth for the Commonwealth and nation.

<sup>21</sup> [https://humanservices.vermont.gov/sites/ahsnew/files/documents/ONA%20Overview\\_VT.pdf](https://humanservices.vermont.gov/sites/ahsnew/files/documents/ONA%20Overview_VT.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Singer, A. and Myers, D. (2016), [Labor Force growth increasingly depends on migrants and their children](#), Urban Institute

**Figure 9.**

**Immigrants are More Likely to be Working Age in Virginia**



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.**

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

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

Reports show that during the pandemic, New American healthcare 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.<sup>23</sup> In Virginia, where New Americans make up 12.7 percent of the population, 29.4 percent are physicians and surgeons, 18.7

<sup>23</sup>Batalova, J. (2020). [Immigrant Workers: Vital to the U.S. COVID-19 Response, Disproportionately Vulnerable](#), Migration Policy Institute

percent are health aides and 14.0% are nurses.<sup>24</sup> New 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 Bridge<sup>25</sup> 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 Program.<sup>26</sup>

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 year.<sup>27</sup> 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 years.<sup>28</sup> Fortunately, SB 68 was passed by the General Assembly and signed by Governor Youngkin to help alleviate the Commonwealth's teacher shortage. Overall, there is still a shortage as of 2025, but it seems that the latest information indicates an increase in teacher hires and a decrease in overall gap.<sup>29</sup>

### ***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 Program,<sup>30</sup> Virginia Talent Accelerator Program,<sup>31</sup> and Virginia Career Works<sup>32</sup> 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 STEAM 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 learning.<sup>33</sup> And in a study from by the New American Economy in 2012 these details are compelling:

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<sup>24</sup>Rich, A. (2021) [New Americans in Virginia - An overview of immigrants' contributions to the commonwealth](#), New American Economy

<sup>25</sup> World Education Services, [Global Talent Bridge](#)

<sup>26</sup> World Education Services, [Skilled Immigrant Integration Program](#)

<sup>27</sup> Virginia Department of Education, [VDOE Staffing and Vacancy Report](#)

<sup>28</sup> Favola, B. (2022) [SB 68 Provisional teacher licensure; teachers licensed or certified outside of the United States.](#), Virginia Legislative Information System

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.doe.virginia.gov/state-board-data-funding/data-reports/statistics-reports/interactive-data-dashboards/teacher-school-staffing-vacancy-dashboard>

<sup>30</sup> Virginia Economic Development Partnership, [Virginia's Tech Talent Investment Program](#)

<sup>31</sup> Virginia Economic Development Partnership, [Virginia Talent Accelerator Program](#)

<sup>32</sup> [Virginia Career Works](#)

<sup>33</sup> U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, [U.S. Patent Activity Calendar Years 1790 to the Present](#)

- 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 819,644<sup>34</sup> to 914,095.<sup>35</sup> Virginia has some of the highest ranked universities and colleges in the country, yet Virginia is not a top 10 destination for international students. 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 2021-2022.<sup>36</sup> 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 Moving<sup>37</sup>

If Virginia could address opportunities and further 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. However, the overall status would be better addressed if we had the ONAAB proposed JLARC study to express the current New American licensure status.

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 office.<sup>37</sup> 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.

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<sup>34</sup> Ruiz, N. G. (2014) [The Geography of Foreign Students in U.S. Higher Education: Origins and Destinations](#), Brookings Institute

<sup>35</sup> Open Doors, [2021 Fast Facts: International Students](#)

<sup>36</sup> Virginia Economic Development Partnership, [Virginia's 2021-2022 High Demand Occupations List and Underlying Methodology Report](#)

<sup>37</sup> 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 while expressing the need for public-private partnerships in the endeavor of:

1. Developing programs and resources that will highlight the benefits of and the process for applying for U.S. citizenship.
2. Developing 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.<sup>38</sup> 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."<sup>39</sup> 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 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 Center,<sup>40</sup> 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.
- 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

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<sup>38</sup> 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://migrationpolicy.org/research/economic-value-citizenship-immigrants-united-states)

<sup>39</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2015. [The Integration of Immigrants into American Society](https://www.nap.edu/read/21746/chapter/1). Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. doi: 10.17226/21746, page 11.

<sup>40</sup> [Citizenship Resource Center | USCIS](https://www.uscis.gov/citizenship/resource-center)

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<sup>41</sup>). The material offers helpful information about education, childcare, employment, what to do in case of an emergency, and several 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 1964<sup>42</sup>, 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 Proficiency<sup>43</sup>,” 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 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*

<sup>41</sup> [Settling in the U.S. | USCIS](#)

<sup>42</sup> [Civil Rights Act \(1964\) | National Archives](#)

<sup>43</sup> [Civil Rights Division | Executive Order 13166 \(justice.gov\)](#)

*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 Counsels,”<sup>44</sup> 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 have a language access plan to the degree of translated documents in a variety of different languages. It is also the case that the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) has a Language Access Coordinator, Language Access Analyst, and Language and Interpretation Manager.<sup>45</sup>

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.

For New Americans, limited English proficiency may pose serious obstacles to integrating into American life and the pursuit of the American Dream.

The Commonwealth has the 10th largest foreign-born population in the country. With 1.19 million foreign born individuals, this constitutes roughly 13.5% 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

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<sup>44</sup> [Attorney General Memorandum - Strengthening the Federal Government's Commitment to Language Access \(justice.gov\)](https://www.justice.gov/olc/strengthening-federal-government-s-commitment-language-access)

<sup>45</sup> [LANGUAGE ACCESS RESOURCE GUIDE](https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/divisions/linguistic-access-language-access-resource-guide/)

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 Training<sup>46</sup> (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 Plan<sup>47</sup> 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 Opportunities.<sup>48</sup> 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.
- The Office of Global Michigan uses EnGen, which is a company that provides industry specific language access services aiming to upskill individuals with the English language use in their specific field. We believe that EnGen could be used by Virginia in a public-private partnership in which, as an example, the state pays for their services and those services can be accessed by companies established in Virginia (i.e. manufacturing, healthcare, and trucking)<sup>49</sup>

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.”*

#### 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

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<sup>46</sup> [Integrated Basic Education Skills and Training \(I-BEST\) | SBCTC](#)

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.michigan.gov/leo/-/media/Project/Websites/leo/Documents/MIHI/DE-Plan---DRAFT.pdf>

<sup>48</sup> <https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/sb22-140>

<sup>49</sup> [EnGen - Language upskilling platform](#)

“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"><li>• Circuit Courts</li><li>• Court of Appeals</li><li>• Department of Medical Assistance Services</li><li>• Department of Motor Vehicles</li><li>• Judicial Inquiry and Review Commission</li><li>• Supreme Court of Virginia</li><li>• Virginia Department of Health</li><li>• Virginia Department of Transportation</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Department of Corrections</li><li>• Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation</li><li>• Office of the Children's Ombudsman</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired</li><li>• Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing</li><li>• Department of Education</li><li>• Department of Elections</li><li>• Department of Labor and Industry</li><li>• Virginia Employment Commission</li></ul>

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

This is of 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 (VAAAF), 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
Sec. of Commonwealth	Sec. of Commonwealth		Sec. of 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

During the 2025 Legislative Session, in a bipartisan effort, the Office of New Americans Advisory Board had [HB2779 - 2025 Regular Session | LIS](#) which incorporated all of the above recommendations. We are recommending that this same bill be reintroduced in 2026.

## 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.

Furthermore, we believe that such a study should be recurring with every census.

**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 related to the Immigrant Services side of its function. 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;*
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 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.<sup>26</sup>

*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 on 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 2026-2028 would be \$2,563,000 in addition to the current budget for the Office of New Americans.

## **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**

- Legislative proposal on Honor Violence (p.20)
- STEAM education proposal (p.22)
- 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 centralized resource database for New Americans (p.25)
- Establishment of Virginia New Americans Economic Forum (p.26)

##### **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, expectations, and milestones 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. 41)

### **Legislative**

- Amend the Code to allow for more meetings per year. (p. 40)
- Amend the Code to raise the number of appointed non legislative citizen Board members to twenty-one. (p. 40)
- Amend the Code to include additional ex-officio members to the Board. (p.40-14)
- Amend the Code governing Freedom of Information Act to allow all subcommittee meetings to be electronic as defined by Code §2.2-2100. (p. 40)
- Commission a new JLARC study to assess the integration of New Americans in the Commonwealth and update the findings from the 2004 report. (p. 41)
- Enhance the Office of New Americans budget to address expanded and unmet needs. (p. 41)

## 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, Interim Commissioner of the Department of Social Services Kevin Erskine, 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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