



## World Education Services Statement of Support for S 194

World Education services (WES) supports S 194, which promotes the economic inclusion of the more than 31,000 immigrants and refugees who live in Vermont<sup>1</sup> by requesting recommendations for creating an Office of New Americans (ONA) in the state.

WES is a non-profit social enterprise that supports the educational, economic, and social inclusion of immigrants, refugees, and international students. For 50 years, WES has set the standard for international academic credential evaluation, supporting millions of people as they seek to achieve their academic and professional goals. Through decades of experience as a leader in global education, WES has developed a wide range of tools to pursue social impact at scale. From evaluating academic credentials to shaping policy, designing programs, and providing philanthropic funding, we partner with a diverse set of organizations, leaders, and networks to uplift individuals and drive systems change. Together with its partners, WES enables people to learn, work, and thrive in new places.

WES has joined with one such partner, the American Immigration Council, to convene the ONA State Network. This network provides a forum for state policy leaders across the U.S. to drive transformative reforms that ensure immigrants and refugees are welcomed in their communities and have meaningful access to programs and services. State ONAs improve the efficiency and efficacy of immigrant and refugee inclusion initiatives by serving as a central hub to facilitate state-level, cross-sector coordination of services, resources, and policy development.

As U.S. immigrant and refugee populations continue to grow, so does the potential for state ONAs to make a positive impact on local economies. With nationwide labor shortages<sup>2</sup> deepening across critical sectors, immigrant and refugee workers have become increasingly crucial to Vermont's economy, comprising 5.8% of the state's workforce.<sup>3</sup> Yet many of Vermont's immigrants remain unemployed or underemployed, systemic barriers preventing them from fully utilizing their education and skills. About one fifth of these individuals hold a bachelor's degree or higher.<sup>4</sup> An ONA can help diversify and bolster Vermont's workforce by facilitating the transition of competent, qualified immigrant and refugee workers into the fields that need them.

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<sup>1</sup> "Immigrants in Vermont." American Immigration Council.

<https://map.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/locations/vermont/>

<sup>2</sup> "Understanding America's Labor Shortage." U.S. Chamber of Commerce, January 9, 2024.

<https://www.uschamber.com/workforce/understanding-americas-labor-shortage>.

<sup>3</sup> "Immigrants in Vermont." American Immigration Council.

<https://map.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/locations/vermont/>

<sup>4</sup> "State Workforce Data - US." migrationpolicy.org. Migration Policy Institute, November 1, 2021.

<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/workforce/US/VT/>



By requesting recommendations for a state ONA tasked with promoting economic mobility for immigrants and refugees, S 194 will provide essential support to Vermont's efforts to address labor shortages and ensure a more inclusive workforce.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement of support.