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Chairs White and Sirotkin:

Thank you both for joining me Wednesday at the roundtable discussion on New Americans in Vermont's workforce. I suspect you found the discussion as informative and engaging as I did. I was particularly impressed with the employers who have made such positive strides creating inclusive workplaces, and who described their success as rooted in that inclusivity.

I came away from the discussion feeling that Vermont can do a better job integrating New Americans living in Vermont into the workforce, and can work smarter to encourage other New Americans to come to Vermont to live and work.

Below I have identified a series of recommendations stemming either from the Wednesday meeting or from the Secretary of State report entitled Occupational Regulation and Migrant Professionals in Vermont: Reducing Barriers for Qualified Immigrants. I have broken them down by committee.

Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing, and General Affairs

1. Effort should be made to reduce the bureaucratic paperwork associated with utilizing ELL funds through the Vermont DOL. We heard that while the funds have been helpful to some employers, use of the funds requires considerable staff time viewed to of little value. The Committee should work with VT DOL to determine if utilization of these funds can be made simpler.
2. USCRI Vermont provides ELL training that is free to employers, but it seems many employers who would benefit are unaware of the opportunity. The Committee

should work with VT DOL and USCRI Vermont to improve outreach to employers about this valuable resource.

3. The employers we spoke with have made great strides creating welcoming and inclusive work environments for employees who have come to the United States from other lands. Yet even they said they'd benefit from the development of a "Best Practices" summary to learn how different employers have addressed the unique language, transportation, cultural, and other challenges faced by New Americans as they try to enter and succeed in the Vermont workforce. The Committee should work with VT DOL to develop such a Best Practices document.

4. Some employers may be reluctant to hire a New American because the employee is perceived to be likely to need an onerous amount of attention and special accommodation to be a successful contributor to the workplace. It was suggested that a "Readiness Certificate" for New Americans based upon completion of a program of work readiness would remove a barrier to employment for many New Americans. The Committee should explore this idea with VT DOL and possibly an institution like CCV. The idea of a New American Academy was also raised and may be a tool for this purpose.

5. In terms of building inclusive workplace environments for today's New American workers and for those who come to Vermont in the future, many employers indicated the State should develop a "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity" certificate program for employers. This certification, earned by the adoption and implementation of a set of workplace policies, would signal to potential workers that the employer is a welcoming one for New Americans. The certificate would also reflect the building of an inclusive workplace culture which will benefit all employees at a given workplace. The Committee should work with the VT DOL and other organizations (perhaps the VT Chamber, the Lake Champlain Chamber, VBSR, and others) to develop such an employer certification program.

6. The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) exists to help employees in times of personal need. It is not clear whether the EAP staff includes any New Americans who would have a closer understanding of the pressures and challenges facing New American workers. If not, this should be considered. At a minimum, the EAP staff should be trained in the cultural competencies necessary to effectively meet the needs of this segment of Vermont's workforce. The Committee should explore with VT DOL how to make sure this important need is being met.

7. We heard from a number of employers that secondary migration is a challenge - a Bhutanese individual, for example, may arrive to the U.S. and be placed in Vermont, but then may move to Ohio where there is a large concentration of Bhutanese. Vermont should be an in-migration state, not an out-migration state. The Committee should work with the Agency of Commerce and Community

Development to determine whether VT marketing funds should be targeted to New American populations in other states to alert them to Vermont's inclusive workplace practices and employment opportunities.

Senate Committee on Government Operations

8. Several employers described the difficulty their employees have when they interact with state agencies - specifically cited were the UI Division at VT DOL, DCF, and the DMV. While language is likely a frequent barrier, state agencies would benefit from training specifically designed to help state employees meet the needs of New Americans.

The Committee should work with the Secretary of Administration on a review of which agencies should be so trained, and how the trainings should be conducted.

9. Per the recommendation of the Secretary of State's Occupational Regulation and Migrant Professionals in Vermont: Reducing Barriers for Qualified Immigrants report, the Committee should work with the Office of Professional Regulation and the Agency of Education "to identify direct license equivalents to credentials issued by Canadian federal and provincial licensing bodies," and to contemplate bridge-to-licensure programs where supplemental effort is needed to meet Vermont's licensing criteria, As the report indicates, Canada remains one of the most likely originating countries for new Vermont workers.

10. The Committee should work with the Office of Professional Regulation to follow up on the report's recommendation to establish uniform credential-verification procedures. The specific recommendation to "leverage the Office's umbrella regulatory structure to deploy a uniform, Title 3 statute on the use of credential verification services and the legal effects of an assignment of equivalence" merits consideration.

11. The Committee should work with OPR to continue the work leveraging apprenticeship as a pathway for New Americans to work at their highest level of education, training, and ability.

12. The Committee should work with OPR to provide a path for the New American applicant for licensure who, the report describes, "has much but not enough," specifically by considering bridge programs "that bring training outside the jurisdiction into alignment with Vermont licensing requirements."

Senate Committee on Transportation

Senator Mazza, the following are steps we heard could be taken to support New Americans when it comes to service by the Department of Motor Vehicles. The DMV

is a critical gateway to employment for New Americans. Without a driver's license, employment opportunities are significantly limited. Specifically, to recap what we heard from employers and those who work with New Americans, the DMV should:

13. Conduct cultural competency training to all employees.
14. Offer the written test for a driver's license in additional language beyond the five currently available.
15. Consider allowing an applicant for a driver's license to have a person of his or her choosing in the vehicle during the road test to act as a translator if needed.

Thanks for your efforts exploring the fifteen specific recommendations above. I look forward to your combined efforts to make Vermont a national leader in terms of supporting New Americans in the workforce. If the imperative to take action is unclear, I would merely quote two of the successful, growing employers at our roundtable discussion:

"Without these [New American] employees we would have had to leave the state."

"

"New Americans are critical to our growth.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tim", written in a cursive style.

Tim