



*February 8, 2024*

*To: Members of the Vermont Senate Committee on Government Operations*

*From: Rich André, Director, State and Local Initiatives, American Immigration Council*

***Re: S.194: An Act relating to public safety reporting***

Dear Chair Hardy and members of the Senate Committee on Government Operations,

My name is Rich André, and I am the Director of State and Local Initiatives at the American Immigration Council (the Council). The Council works to create a more welcoming America – one that provides a fair immigration process for new Americans and adopts policies that take into account the vital contributions they make to the U.S. economy.

I am submitting written testimony in strong support of S.194, which would require the Agency of Human Services, the Department of Labor, and the Office of Racial Equity to submit recommendations on the utility and structure of a to-be-created independent Office of New Americans in Vermont. Over the past several years, my organization has worked with leaders in government, business, and civil society to establish and support similar state-level offices across the country. To facilitate the social, economic, and cultural integration of immigrant and refugee communities, Offices of New Americans work across state agencies and community-based organizations to ensure equitable access to services and information; engage the private sector to attract and retain international talent and secure employment; and convene relevant stakeholders to best coordinate efforts.

Vermont has the opportunity to join a growing number of states that recognize the return on investing in new American integration. In the past three years alone, Colorado, Maryland, Oregon, and North Dakota enacted bipartisan legislation to establish such statewide offices, bringing the total number of states with these offices or senior advisor positions to 20.

These offices are focused on ensuring the successful integration of new Americans into local communities and workforces. For example, the Office of Global Michigan worked with their Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs to create 44 licensing guides over three years to help internationally trained professionals attain licenses for in-demand jobs, including doctors, teachers, and cosmetologists. In 2020, the New York Office of New Americans launched Immigrants Can Code, a digital literacy project to ensure that immigrants have access to digital literacy education to meet workforce demands. In Colorado, the Office of New Americans established a Virtual, Career-Aligned English as a Second Language (VCESL) program to provide career and sector-specific adult English language courses to help newcomers build the skills they need to contribute to the state's workforce.

In collaboration with World Education Services, my organization convenes these offices through the Office of New Americans State Network. Individuals appointed to conduct integration work in Vermont

would be welcome to participate in the Network where they can learn best practices from counterparts across the country and ensure Vermont is well-positioned to sustain a productive and successful Office of New Americans that helps facilitate the full integration of the state's immigrant and refugee communities to the benefit of all.

To help illustrate why this issue is important and why it makes sense to think of an Office of New Americans as an economic integration and workforce issue, my organization conducted quantitative research using data from the 2021 American Community Survey to highlight the impact immigrants and refugees already have in Vermont:<sup>1</sup>

- **Immigrants made up 5.8 percent of Vermont's labor force in 2021 despite comprising only 4.9 percent of the state's population.** This community is critical to the state's future workforce: 70.1 percent of immigrants in Vermont are of working age (16-64 years of age) compared to 63.1
- **Immigrants in Vermont paid over \$430.0 million in taxes in 201 – including \$146.5 million in state and local taxes – and held \$1.0 billion in spending power that is reinjected into the state's economy.**
- **More than half of the state's immigrants have become naturalized citizens.** As neighbors, business owners, taxpayers, and workers, immigrants are an integral part of Vermont's diverse and thriving communities and make extensive contributions that benefit all.

Vermont has the opportunity to maximize this economic impact, invest in the state's future workforce, and ensure the full integration of immigrants and refugees. I encourage the Committee to support S.194 and the work to explore the creation of a Vermont Office of New Americans.

Rich André

Director, State and Local Initiatives

American Immigration Council

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<sup>1</sup> Available at <https://map.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/locations/vermont/>