

December 13, 2024

From: Jan Steinbauer, VT-NH Asylum Support Network Convener

Re: Supporting Asylum Seekers in Vermont

Dear Members of the Vermont Legislature,

The Vermont-New Hampshire Asylum Support Network (VT-NH-ASN) is a collaboration of community-based nonprofit organizations that welcome and support asylum seekers in Vermont and New Hampshire. As Vermont representatives of this network, we respectfully urge the Vermont Legislature to prioritize the following initiatives to support the growing population of asylum seekers and immigrants in Vermont. These efforts will enhance the well-being of our communities and foster the successful integration of new Vermonters into the state's workforce and society.

1. Renew and Increase Funding for the Statewide Asylum Seekers Assistance Program

In the early 2000s, Vermont's immigrant population was around 13,000 (U.S. Census Bureau). By 2023, this population grew to an estimated 28,000–32,000 (American Immigration Council; National Immigrant Women's Advocacy Project), representing over 115% growth in two decades. Service providers from the Vermont Asylum Support Network, through the Statewide Asylum Seekers Assistance Program (SASAP) grant, have observed a significant rise in asylum seekers, often struggling to meet their growing needs.

We propose increasing SASAP funding to \$1,000,000 annually, with \$500,000 allocated for direct services and program administration and \$500,000 for hiring paid staff. Currently, most organizations are volunteer led. Establishing paid staff capacity is crucial to ensure sustainable and high-quality support for asylum seekers. This investment will bolster the direct services needed to help asylum seekers access housing, healthcare, and integrate into Vermont's workforce.

2. Support an "Office of New Americans" Equivalent with a Centralized Legal Intake and Referral System

VT-NH Asylum Support Network Legislative Priorities 2025

As Vermont's immigrant population grows, asylum seekers face significant challenges accessing the legal aid essential for their successful integration. The current fragmented system leads to delays, confusion, and barriers to workforce participation.

An "Office of New Americans" equivalent with a centralized legal service intake and referral system would streamline access, reduce inefficiencies, and support the integration of immigrants into Vermont's workforce.

We endorse ongoing efforts to establish an "Office of New Americans" equivalent and support the reprisal of Senator Martine Laroque Gulick's S.194 (2024) in the upcoming legislative session regarding research on the utility of ONAs.

Thank you for your attention to these important matters. We look forward to working together to ensure Vermont remains a welcoming and supportive place for all.

Sincerely,

Jan Steinbauer

VT-NH Asylum Support Network Convener

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Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity (CVOEO)

Central Vermont Refugee Action Network (CVRAN)

Bridge to Rutland (B2R)

Northeast Kingdom Asylum Seekers Assistance Network (NEKASN)

Supporting and Helping Asylees and Refugees, Inc. (SHARe)

Community Asylum Seekers Project (CASP)