

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Senator Martine Larocque Gulick (D-Chittenden Central), Lead Sponsor of S.56; and Representative Leonora Dodge (D-Chittenden), Lead Sponsor of H.375

**From:** Jill Martin Diaz, Esq., Executive Director, Vermont Asylum Assistance Project

**Date:** March 9, 2025

**RE:** FAQs about the VT Office of New Americans (ONA) companion bills, SB56 and HB375 (2025)

### Who are “New Americans?”

- Formerly standard, but now dated, description referring generally to the **sum-total of foreign-born or immigrant subpopulations** living in the United States (US).
  - **Includes refugee** subpopulations for example, as well as every other subpopulation.
  - Intended to connote a sense of welcoming but has the effect of erasing Latin Americans’ preexisting identities as Americans before they immigrated to the US.
- Adopted extensively by states to refer to foreign-born people served by **state agencies fostering social and economic immigrant workforce integration**—so-called Offices of New Americans or ONAs.
- A **national, bipartisan network of 22 state ONAs affiliate** through the ONA State Network to share ideas, strategies, and technical assistance.
- Here, **VAAP supports the ONA State Network’s recommendation** that VT adopt CO’s definition:
  - **“A New American is a Vermonter who has arrived, and a person who will arrive, to VT as an immigrant or refugee, and their children.” See [ona.colorado.gov](https://ona.colorado.gov).**
  - This definition maximizes social and economic return on investment by including the largest number of constituents.

### Why does VT need an Office of New Americans if it already has a State Refugee Office?

- **VT State Refugee Office (SRO) focuses narrowly** on social and economic immigrant workforce integration for the subpopulation of people with refugee status or asylee status, pursuant to federal and state law (approximately 50-350 people arriving annually).
- In 2023, **SRO reported great outcomes toward economic self-sufficiency for eligible subpopulations** through housing navigation, employment assistance, school registration, English Language Learning (ELL) classes, case management to access basic material and healthcare needs and eligible federal assistance programs.
- **VT needs more people**, and the Working Futures 2025 *Vermont Economic Action Plan* prioritizes **increasing “pathways for recruiting international migrants to Vermont.”**
  - Immigrants are VT’s fastest growing working age demographic, and more working Vermonters means lower cost of housing and healthcare downstream.
  - Immigrant workers are 80% more likely to start businesses and fill workforce gaps.
  - Immigrant workers contribute about \$226.3M in taxes and \$619.9M in spending.

## MEMORANDUM

- Thousands of **immigrant workers could join Vermont's local economy more fully and thrive long term** with access to integration supports like the SRO offers to refugees/asylees.
  - Licensing, education, and language barriers.
  - Fragmented services create inefficiencies.
  - Foreign-born entrepreneurs lack culturally and linguistically appropriate access.
- **Vermont must fortify the SRO and make economic self-sufficiency available to all of Vermont's future immigrant workers if it is to survive federal austerity.**
  - Nationally, the Refugee Program is under attack and Vermont will suffer compounded economic harm if we lose the SRO's economic self-sufficiency services for Vermont's future workforce.
  - SRO would see even further enhanced outcomes if legislatively empowered to promote immigrant workforce integration for all subpopulations, who already come to the SRO for assistance with coordination and issue resolution.

### What costs and benefits do bipartisan member-states of the ONA State Network report?

- Scope and responsibilities of ONAs vary, but ONAs have **created professional licensing pathway guides** for immigrants, championed legislation to **remove professional licensing barriers** for internationally trained workers, led **immigration legal defense** programs, and **implemented ELL training** programs.
- Several ONAs publish reports that showcase their own work and impact:
  - **Colorado:** [2024 Annual Report](#), [2023 Annual Report](#), celebrating the prosperity of CO's immigrants who contribute \$1.8B in total business income and \$6.6B in taxes as a result of the ONA-coordinated legal assistance to ~3,600 people annually and housing assistance to ~6,600 people annually.
  - **Michigan:** [FY24-25 Report to the Legislature](#), celebrating its ONA's coordination of medical screenings, social services, youth mentoring, and a 43% job placement rate and 85% retention rate for over 11K immigrants served.
  - **Minnesota:** [2024 Annual Report](#), innovating public-private collaborations their new ONA is delivering to support sustainable workforce solutions.
  - **New York:** [2023 Annual Report](#), celebrating "strong, innovative programming and the dedication of its statewide network of community-based providers. . . to assist new Americans across the State and . . . focusing on the key issue areas impacting immigrant integration as outlined in its legislation, including ESOL, legal services, workforce development, community and civic engagement, and support of the ONA network."
  - **North Dakota:** [Office of Legal Immigration Findings and Initial Recommendations \(May 2024\)](#), mapping out a robust state-level plan to help businesses recruit, integrate, and retain immigrant workers.

## MEMORANDUM

### Do ONAs risk compromising community safety or economic viability?

- **No**, none of the 22 ONAs nor the ONA State Network report any association between creating an ONA and an increase in crime or other public safety issues.
- This is likely because ONAs are **established to help ensure the successful integration** of immigrants and their families, to the benefit of everyone in the state.
- In general, immigrants are [associated with lower crime rates](#):
  - FBI and Census data from 2017-2022 at the intersection between total crime rates and immigrant shares of state populations across all 50 states **shows no statistically significant correlation**, which aligns with a wealth of prior research on this topic (American Immigration Council).
- **ONAs enhance rather than compromise public safety** by increasing state capacity to assist immigrant workers with completing their required rigorous vetting and legal processes, which in turn helps immigrant workers integrate into social and economic life more seamlessly and sustainably, which in turn contributes to overall public safety for all.

### Who from VT wants to create an ONA equivalent?

- **Bipartisan cosponsors** for companion bills S.56 and H.375.
- Broad in-principal support at community meetings including those hosted by the SRO's **Refugee and Immigrant Service Providers Network VT** (RISPNET VT) and the **Vermont Asylum Support Network** (VASN) member organizations.
- Letter of support from **World Education Services**, which coordinates the ONA State Network along with the American Immigration Council.
- Letter of support from **Vermont Treasurer Mike Pieciak** and his **Federal Transition Task Force**.
- Letter of support from **over 20 Vermont immigrant workforce integration experts**, including immigration legal experts being consulted for how Vermont's economy can best weather anti-immigrant federal policies such as the **ACLU VT, Migrant Justice, and VAAP**.
- The proposed course of study would make certain the most impacted voices drive planning.