

February 16, 2022

My name is Michelle Rivero. I am the Director of the Minneapolis Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (OIRA) and am writing to express support for the establishment of a statewide Office of New Americans here in Minnesota.

Minnesota is home to over 450,000 people who were born outside of the United States, composing close to 9% of the state's population. In the City of Minneapolis, an estimated 63,300 city residents were born in another country. Regardless of country of origin, regardless of immigration status, all Minnesota residents benefit from a robust welcoming infrastructure, one that spurs economic and employment opportunity, civic engagement, safety, and equitable access to information, programs and services.

A statewide Office of New Americans would make a powerful contribution to Minnesota's welcoming infrastructure.

Since the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development created and staffed the position of Assistant Commissioner for Immigrant and Refugee Affairs in 2020, immigrant and refugee residents across the state, including in Minneapolis, have had increased access to information (including on economic and workforce opportunities and programs), critical collaboration on issues touching New American and aspiring New American communities in Minnesota, and an important champion for development of policies that ensure equitable access to services, resources, and opportunities in our state.

This position has facilitated connections with immigrant and refugee inclusion stakeholders across the entire state, including residents, community-based organizations, faith-based institutions, as well as municipal, county and state level governmental staff. These connections have supported work in areas such as language access, equitable communication of funding opportunities, and, most recently, the rapid statewide effort to welcome and resettle over 1000 Afghan evacuees within a 6-month period.

An Office of New Americans in the state of Minnesota, like similar offices in states as diverse as Michigan, Colorado, Maryland and Virginia, would significantly further these efforts to support residents in achieving economic success and civic participation and address challenges for which there is not yet a statewide strategy—for example, coordinating efforts so that our state's 69,000+ US permanent residents take that last step towards obtaining United States Citizenship, so that these residents can access the right to vote as well as the many additional economic opportunities (for themselves and for their communities) that result

after one becomes a United States citizen.^{1 2} An office serving all of Minnesota's New American and aspiring New American residents would also offer important momentum for development of policies promoting immigrant and refugee inclusion.

Through the City of Minneapolis's participation in the Gateways for Growth initiative led by the Minneapolis Regional Chamber, stakeholders have highlighted economic development, community safety, and equitable access to housing, education and healthcare as important areas of focus to ensure that all of our residents are able to access opportunity and truly feel at home in our state. Through this engagement, a desire for coordinated and centralized services for New Americans has been highlighted as an area of need.

It is also worth noting that, while the City of Minneapolis and City of St. Paul have programs and offices dedicated to immigrant and refugee affairs, at present these offices do not exist in other regions of our state. In my position, I regularly encounter situations where I am asked to respond to concerns and questions from beyond the municipal boundaries of the Twin Cities, including in outstate Minnesota. Such concerns would be ideally served by an office with the jurisdictional reach of a statewide Office of New Americans.

The City of Minneapolis is a Welcoming City, one that recognizes that "fostering a welcoming environment for all individuals, regardless of race, ethnicity, or place of origin, gender identity or religious affiliation enhances Minneapolis's cultural fabric, economic growth, global competitiveness and overall prosperity for current and future generations."³ As Director of the Minneapolis Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs, I would welcome the opportunity to partner and collaborate with a state level office dedicated to immigrant and refugee inclusion, one that supports our New American and aspiring new American community in achieving a sense of belonging in our state and country, and I believe our continued success as a state is dependent upon the strength, ingenuity and talent of our immigrant and refugee residents. For these reasons, I strongly support the creation of a statewide Office of New Americans.

Please contact me if there is additional information I can provide regarding this statement.

Sincerely,



Michelle Rivero,
Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs, City of Minneapolis

¹ A 2017-2018 impact report by the organization Cities for Citizenship entitled [America is Home: How Individuals, Families, Cities and Counties Benefit by Investing in Citizenship, 2017-2018 Impact Report](#)

indicates that acquiring US Citizenship increases the likelihood of obtaining employment and better paying employment, leading to a measurable growth in spending power and economic security. Additionally, naturalized citizens are almost twice as likely to be homeowners as noncitizens and are also significantly more likely to be "banked," i.e. to have access to traditional banking institutions.

² See Center of Migration Studies webpage entitled, "Estimates of Undocumented and Eligible to Naturalize Populations by State" at: data.cmsny.org.

³ See City of Minneapolis Welcoming City Resolution, 2017 (<https://lims.minneapolismn.gov/RCA/1013>)