



March 3, 2023

Senator Bobby Jo Champion, Chair
Jobs and Economic Development Committee
Room 1100 Minnesota Senate Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Chair Champion and Members

On behalf of the Minneapolis Regional Chamber, I want to take this opportunity to express my support for the establishment of the Minnesota Office for New Americans, which will promote inclusion and more equitable access to programs and services for the more than 472,000 immigrants and refugees who live in Minnesota.

In September 2020 the Minneapolis Regional Chamber, in partnership with the City of Minneapolis, applied for and was awarded the Gateways for Growth Challenge grant, making us one of only 19 communities chosen for this opportunity. As part of this award, we received a report from New American Economy (now American Immigration Council) detailing the economic contributions of immigrants and refugees in the City of Minneapolis. As of 2019, immigrants and refugees made up 14.9% of the total population for the City of Minneapolis and leveraged \$1.2 billion in spending power. While immigrants and refugees make up nearly 15% of the total population, they make up 17.4% of the working age population and are over 20% more likely to be of working age than their U.S. -born counterparts. This report also confirmed what so many of us already knew, immigrants and refugees played a critical role in our city's ability to weather the pandemic. They made up 42% of the essential services workforce, 18% of healthcare workers, 18% of food service workers, 25% of transportation and warehousing workers and 15% of the essential retail trade workforce. These industries that are disproportionately populated by immigrants and refugees are some of the very same industries that are still struggling to find workers today.

Another component to the Gateways for Growth work was a partnership with the City of St. Paul and St. Paul Area Chamber of Commerce to develop a multisector strategic plan to improve immigrant and refugee inclusion in the Twin Cities. This strategic plan, *The Journey to Belonging in the Twin Cities*, details the results of months of engagement with partner organizations and community members across the city that informed a comprehensive set of recommendations to improve immigrant and refugee inclusion in areas including civic engagement, government leadership, access to housing, healthcare, education workforce and economic development, education, amongst others. One of the primary concerns we heard is a lack of centralized services for New Americans, and that is gap we believe the Office of New Americans can fill.

Our state's character is inseparable from the story of immigration, and we know immigration is a cornerstone of Minneapolis' economic competitiveness. That is why the Minneapolis Regional Chamber is pleased to lend our support to the creation of the Minnesota Office of New Americans, so that all Minnesotans have the opportunity to thrive.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jonathan Weinhagen', written in a cursive style.

Jonathan Weinhagen
President & CEO
Minneapolis Regional Chamber



Cc: Senator Mohamed, Vice Chair
Senator Draheim
Senator Gustafson
Senator Hawj
Senator Housley
Senator Nelson
Senator Pratt
Senator Putnam