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Governor Phil Murphy

New Office of New Americans Investing in New Jersey's Immigrant Communities

10/14/2020

State Budget Makes Investments to Improve Immigrant Legal Assistance and Advance Immigrant Integration Efforts

TRENTON – Today, Governor Phil Murphy, Human Services Commissioner Carole Johnson, and Labor and Workforce Development Commissioner Robert Asaro-Angelo highlighted investments in New Jersey's immigrant communities through the Office of New Americans (ONA), including how the newly signed State budget will invest in providing critical legal representation to immigrants facing deportation and efforts to integrate immigrant residents into the workforce.

The FY 2021 State budget signed by Governor Murphy doubled the funding for legal representation from \$3.1 million to \$6.2 million. The Office of New Americans, housed within the Department of Human Services, will be responsible for the oversight of this critical program that, through community-based legal services organizations, has so far provided legal representation to more than 1,500 immigrants facing deportation and has successfully helped many long-term New Jerseyans remain with their families.

Last year, Governor Murphy signed Executive Order 74 directing the Department of Human Services (DHS) and Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DOL) to establish the Office of New Americans to support immigrants and refugees in New Jersey through outreach, education, and legal services. The Office was launched earlier this year and is led by Johanna Calle, Senior Policy Advisor of New Americans for DHS.

"In New Jersey, we know that our greatest strength lies in our diversity, and we are unwavering in our commitment to protect our immigrant communities," **said Governor Murphy**. "With this funding, we are building on our promise to support critical legal representation and provide job opportunities to ensure that all New Jerseyans can succeed and thrive."

"We're very excited by all the benefits the Office of New Americans will bring to communities throughout New Jersey, which has always been and will remain a welcoming state," **Human Services Commissioner Johnson said**. "Policies and initiatives that help integrate immigrants lead to vibrant, prosperous communities and a stronger economy and workforce, and part of that ensures immigrants get critical legal representation that can help keep families together. We are committed to welcoming new Americans as our neighbors, colleagues and friends."

With the leadership of the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the ONA is also managing New Jersey's participation in the World Education Services (WES) Skilled Immigrant Integration Project. Earlier this year, New Jersey was chosen among eight other jurisdictions to receive technical assistance and coaching to advance policies that better integrate immigrant residents into the workforce. Through this process, New Jersey is identifying ways to increase opportunities for immigrants to participate in adult education and employment services as well as removing barriers for immigrants to enter the workforce and strengthen their economic footing.

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"The opportunity to attain the dignity of work is essential for a new American to successfully settle in our state," **Labor Commissioner Asaro-Angelo said.** "The Labor Department is committed to the principles of inclusion, opportunity and safety in the workplace, and proud to play an integral role in supporting new Americans."

Nearly 23 percent – more than 2 million – of New Jersey's 9 million residents are immigrants, making New Jersey the third state, after California and New York, with the largest proportion of foreign-born residents.

The Office of New Americans launched earlier this year in the midst of unprecedented public health challenges, making it increasingly critical to reach every New Jerseyan with information regarding COVID-19 resources and education. In April, DHS welcomed Johanna Calle as Senior Policy Advisor of New Americans. Calle most recently worked as Director of the New Jersey Alliance for Immigrant Justice, where she led a coalition of more than 40 immigrant rights organizations advocating for more welcoming local and state policies, including the passage of the driver's licenses for all legislation.

"Immigrant communities in our state have a long history of enriching our culture and making our workforce and economy stronger," **Senior Policy Advisor of New Americans Johanna Calle said.** "I look forward to bringing my personal and professional experience to this new role where I can help New Jersey be a stronger and fairer state in which all New Jerseyans, including immigrants and refugees, can thrive."

The Office has been tasked with promoting trainings that inform new Americans of the availability of services and their rights, including in the employment context; working with organizations and advocacy groups to increase accessibility to State programs for new Americans; and ensuring that services are accessible to new American populations, including those who speak languages other than English. Since April, the ONA has distributed resources and materials regarding the federal Public Charge rule and benefit impacts, as well as COVID-19 related relief and worker support available regardless of immigration status. DHS and DOL are also releasing a report outlining the ONA's priorities to build trust, improve access to social services, employment services, and legal assistance for immigrants.

The creation of the Office of New Americans is the Administration's latest effort to move forward policies and initiatives to advance integration and welcoming efforts in New Jersey.

Since January 2018, the Murphy Administration has worked across State agencies to:

- Resume the State's role as the State Refugee Resettlement Coordinator after the previous administration relinquished this critical function to the federal government;
- Expand State financial aid for college students regardless of their immigration status;
- Provide funds for legal representation for immigrants facing detention and deportation;
- Limit voluntary cooperation between local law enforcement agencies and federal immigration agencies in order to build trust between local law enforcement and immigrant communities through the Attorney General's Immigrant Trust Directive;
- Strengthen labor laws to protect workers, including immigrant workers, through measures to expand New Jersey's anti-wage theft laws and requiring all employers to provide paid sick leave;
- Participate in at least 11 lawsuits against the Trump Administration's unwelcoming policies, including lawsuits opposing the Trump Administration's public charge rule and lawsuits seeking to protect asylum seekers and DACA recipients;
- Sign legislation to make it possible for immigrants, regardless of immigration status, to obtain a driver's license.
- Allow foreign-credentialed physicians to obtain temporary licenses to respond to the COVID-19 health crisis; and

- Sign legislation making New Jersey the first state on the East Coast to provide trained and qualified residents access to occupational licenses, regardless of immigration status.

For a copy of the report from DHS and DOL, please click here (<https://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/library/slides/NJ%20ONA%20Report%20-%20Final%2010.14.2020.pdf>).

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