

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION IS A DYNAMIC, two-way process in which immigrants and the receiving society work together to build secure, vibrant, and cohesive communities. As an intentional effort, integration engages and transforms all community members, reaping shared benefits and creating a new whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Washington has had a long history of welcoming immigrants and bringing them into the greater community. We have understood that we need to include all members of our community and foster their ability to contribute to the economy and society. While the state of Washington has worked on elements of immigrant integration for years, comprehensive strategy for immigrant integration began in February 2008 with the signing of the New American Council Executive Order by Governor Christine O. Gregoire. The Executive Order established a New Americans Policy Council that would provide recommendations to the Governor on strategies the State could undertake to facilitate more effective and comprehensive immigrant integration. We recognize that many of our recommendations rely heavily on collaboration and partnership between the State, community institutions, private non-profit agencies, philanthropic organizations, and local governments to successfully implement these integration strategies.

Proposed areas of focus from the Executive Order included strategies to help legal permanent residents become naturalized; acquisition of English language skills integral to the process of becoming citizens; ways to recognize or transfer the skills, certifications and professional credentials people earn in other countries into Washington's economy; strategies that are needed to support the success for naturalization, English language acquisition and recognition or transference of certifications and professional credentials; and facilitating public-private partnerships for the integration of people seeking to become New Americans into the very fabric of our state, thus creating a more vibrant, prosperous and vital society. Policy Council members, appointed by the Governor, include business, faith, labor, law enforcement, community, philanthropic, and governmental leaders from across our state.

Washington is part of a national trend in immigration and is classified by researchers as a "new growth states." From 1990-2000, the number of foreign born in Washington increased by

90.7 percent, but from 1990-2007 Washington has seen a 147 percent increase in number of foreign born. Washington has approximately 778,501 foreign born or about 12.2 percent of the state's population. Today, Washington is tenth in the nation for size of the foreign born population, fifteenth in percentage of total population, fifth for refugee resettlement, and second for secondary migration of refugees. Washington's immigrants are extremely diverse, coming largely from Latin America (31.2 percent) and Asia (39.1 percent).

The reality of the State's budget deficit and the economic recession weighed heavily on the Policy Council at each meeting. We took both the State's serious economic situation and our duties as a Council seriously and worked to prioritize the best of many recommendations we considered. We specifically set criteria for ourselves that the recommendations we advocated in this report would meet one or more of the following criteria to be included:

1. Cross cutting initiatives that would yield benefits for multiple sectors
2. Areas where public dollars could be leveraged by private or federal dollars.
3. Initiatives that place a high value in building trust and engaging immigrant communities.
4. Low cost initiatives that have an impact on immigrant integration.

After deliberations, the Policy Council chose to focus its recommendations in the select areas of:

- Implement a Statewide Campaign for English Language Learning;
- Support and Encourage Citizenship;
- Establish Sources of Centralized, "One Stop" Information for Immigrants and Refugees;
- Enhance Language Access;
- Promote Cross-Cultural Community Safety;
- Provide Immigrant and Refugee Professionals Pathways for Career Re-Entry;
- Celebrate Washington's Diverse Immigrant Communities; and

► Advocate Actively on Key Federal Issues that Relate to Immigrant Integration.

The following recommendations came from Policy Council members with many diverse perspectives and experiences, but who were unanimous in the desire to help integrate immigrants into our communities as positively and quickly as possible.

RECOMMENDATION ONE

Implement a Statewide Campaign for English Language Learning

The Policy Council believes that English Language Acquisition is perhaps the most important tool for both economic and cultural immigrant integration. Learning English increases immigrants' earning power and enhances their participation in their communities by enabling immigrants to access information and services and more smoothly communicate with their neighbors, children's teachers, and law enforcement. According to the 2007 American Community Survey, there are 384,647 foreign born in Washington who speak English less than very well. The Policy Council believes there is a tremendous opportunity to address this gap through an innovative public-private partnership between state government, business, educators, labor unions, the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, foundations, service providers and immigrant advocates to create, fund, and implement a three-year campaign to promote English Language Acquisition.

The campaign would have three core goals: 1) expand services to immigrants, with particular focus on expanding Levels One and Two instruction and ensuring diversity of location that enables immigrants to access services (workplaces, community centers close to immigrant neighborhoods, etc.); 2) promote innovative partnerships between community colleges and service providers or business to pilot programs that more effectively reach immigrants; and 3) launch an effective and coordinated ethnic media campaign to reach immigrants and ensure they understand the new opportunities for English Language Acquisition.

Leveraging public-private partnerships, Washington will become a national leader in providing English literacy programs for immigrants in workplaces, schools, and community centers. We will use innovative technology to reach across Washington, fill in gaps in infrastructure in

Eastern Washington, and reach immigrants in their homes and workplaces.

- ❶ **The Policy Council recommends private and public funding of a three-year “We Want to Learn English” campaign to prioritize English Language Acquisition. The Policy Council is still working on the details of this proposal and will present a more detailed plan in January 2010. The campaign should prioritize:**

SUBREC | Acquiring public-private funding.

SUBREC | Utilizing innovative strategies such as long-distance learning; collaborations between community colleges and nonprofit service providers that focus on determining pathways between Level One (L1) and Level Two (L2) ESL classes and community colleges; workplace English Language programs; and paid apprenticeship programs that combine English Language Learning with job training.

SUBREC | Encouraging public institutions and businesses to offer ELL employees 3-5 hours a week of paid time to attend English class. The immigrant employee would be required to match the hours spent in the classroom during non-work hours. Private employers could obtain some form of tax credit for the course of the campaign for participating. The State could mandate this employee benefit policy for State employees.

SUBREC | Expanding opportunities to engage in combined basic education, ESL, and workforce education to high Level Two ELLs who are motivated to work and have appropriate job skills.

SUBREC | Expanding adult literacy programs that provide training, resources, and information and referral to literacy training programs. These adult literacy programs should be available at community colleges, churches, temples, mosques, community centers, and other places where refugees and immigrants access services and spend time.

SUBREC | Implementing a coordinated and effective media campaign to reach out to immigrants and non-immigrants on the push for English Language Acquisition.

SUBREC | Exploring ways that financial assistance can be provided to all who enroll in community college and university English language programs.

RECOMMENDATION TWO

Support and Encourage Citizenship

In Washington State, there are approximately 160,000 legal permanent residents eligible for citizenship, but who have not yet naturalized because of barriers such as cost; access to services; lack of information; no notification of eligibility; or feelings of fear or intimidation of the process. Promoting citizenship by providing information and services across the state for eligible immigrants is one of the most effective ways of integrating immigrants and building stable families and communities.

A recent editorial from the New York Times emphasizing the benefits of citizenship described the need well: "Turning immigrants into Americans is a mission tied intimately to this country's self-interest and identity, if not its very soul."¹ One of the biggest barriers to naturalizing has been the fees to file for citizenship (\$675/person, not including legal costs). Because the most vulnerable people generally qualify for fee waivers, those just above the limit but who are still very low-income have the most difficulty, making citizenship just out of reach of many working poor families.

- 1 **The Policy Council recommends maintaining and expanding funding for naturalization services, with specific priority to expanding services to additional locations in non-urban centers and Eastern Washington, as well as adding civic engagement/citizenship classes.**

Investing dollars in innovative citizenship programs also positions Washington to receive additional Federal funds that appear likely to support citizenship and leverage State dollars.

- 1 **The Policy Council recommends reducing economic barriers to naturalization by providing a variety of opportunities for eligible permanent residents to obtain their citizenship filing fee through employer support or savings and loan programs. These could include:**

SUBREC | Encouraging State public institutions to give legal permanent residents who are eligible to naturalize 3-5 hours a week of paid time to work towards naturalization by enrolling in a citizenship exam prep or English class. The State should mandate this employee benefit policy for State employees.

SUBREC | Instituting tax credits for businesses that help immigrants obtain citizenship by providing citizenship filing fee bonuses for employees.

SUBREC | Encouraging business to work with unions to include employee benefits around citizenship into labor contracts.

SUBREC | Encouraging the Department of Commerce and credit unions, regional banks and non-profit micro-credits to work with naturalization programs to provide loans for citizenship fees to New Americans.

- 1 **The Policy Council recommends directing the State's Department of Commerce to expand the Individual Development Account program (IDA) to include saving for citizenship fees.**

Currently, the IDA program helps low-income individuals and families save, invest and make purchases to better their lives through: purchasing their first home, obtaining post-secondary education or purchasing assistive technology for work-related needs. The Policy Council proposes expanding the IDA to include saving for citizenship fees. This is currently being done in San Francisco and would be a cost-effective way to make a difference immediately in a tight budget year.

- 1 **The Policy Council recommends funding a study on the impact of naturalization on immigrant integration as a whole, including on the impact on wages and asset building.** This would track the effect of naturalization on upward mobility and integration of New Americans over time, an area where not much research exists.

RECOMMENDATION THREE

Establish Sources of Centralized, "One Stop" Information for Immigrants and Refugees

While navigating institutions can be a challenge for anyone, language barriers, unfamiliarity with government services, fear of government and enforcement or negative experiences with government in their country of origin, can make interacting with government intimidating for immigrants. One of the largest barriers that prevent immigrants from accessing institutions is a lack of information.

- 1 **The Policy Council recommends that the State fund a series of strategies to provide "one stop" information to immigrants. We propose that this be a three-pronged approach, for the short-, medium-, and long-term. Specifically, we recommend:**

SUBREC I In the short-term, establishing a very simple, multi-lingual website that provides important information and links to resources and benefits. This should be a well-designed, attractive, and simple site that is easy to navigate. It can include links to existing resources and programs (such as those available through the Seattle Public Library site). Informational materials might address:

- o *How to access existing health care services, the State Family Assistance program, and Washington Basic Health*
- o *Community and personal safety topics such as child safety seats, bicycle safety, internet crimes, scams*
- o *Information on banking and credit*
- o *Rights of immigrants including information on deportation and rights if a family member is detained*
- o *Specific information on certification or licensing for high growth industries in Washington and a career guide for immigrant professionals*
- o *Programs, resources or trainings available for immigrants looking to start small businesses*

SUBREC I In the short- and medium-term, directing the State to hold mobile resource fairs or Welcoming Center days in high-density immigrant areas across the state, similar to Illinois.

SUBREC I In the short-term, conducting a feasibility study for creating a physical welcome center, and, in the medium- to long-term, working to allocate funds for a physical welcome center.

- ❶ **The Policy Council also recommends that the Office of the Attorney General provide more multilingual information and conduct active outreach to different immigrant communities on their services, particularly focusing on areas of credit, payday lending, mortgages, notaries and other scams.**

RECOMMENDATION FOUR

Enhance Language Access

Language barriers prevent many English Language Learners (ELLs) from interacting effectively with medical institutions and government agencies. Without translated documents and oral interpretation, ELL community members “are less likely to understand and exercise their rights and obligations, less

able to access government services, and less able to achieve economic stability.” While it is crucial to offer opportunities to learn English, at the same time language access services must be provided to ensure that language barriers do not limit the ability of immigrants to integrate into their communities. Further, our state (any program or agency that receives Federal funds) has an obligation to provide language access. It is equally important that smaller agencies and programs across the state that do not receive Federal funds are also encouraged and provided with assistance to create language access plans.

- ❶ **The Policy Council recommends that the Governor sign a Language Access Executive Order that requires all state agencies to assess their abilities to communicate with ELLs.** Each agency will name a language access coordinator who will develop and implement a plan that provides language assistance, such as use of bilingual staff (including assignment pay for bilingual ability), telephone interpretation, oral or written translation services, and translation of important public documents, in at least those languages that are spoken by five percent or more of the state’s population. The Executive Order can also direct agencies to provide signage in agencies and courts and other important places to ensure that ELL individuals know they have the right to free translation. In unveiling the Executive Order, the Governor can also urge city and county agencies to make similar assessments and create language access plans.

SUBREC I (medium term): Establish an Office of Language Access to ensure compliance with the law and to provide technical assistance.

- ❶ **The Policy Council also recommends that the current DSHS interpreter brokerage system-certification testing should be reviewed to balance English proficiency and target language proficiency and then expanded to be available to other agencies.**

RECOMMENDATION FIVE

Promote Cross-Cultural Community Safety

The Policy Council believes that keeping communities safe is an important part of ensuring successful integration, and that trust between law enforcement and communities is essential to ensuring community safety. Some communities absorbing new immigrants may have tension or fear that immigrants

bring crime, a misconception that has been debunked by extensive research across the country and actual experiences in places such as Pasco, Washington. Many immigrants, at the same time, are afraid to report crimes and initiate contact with law enforcement. Research shows that language barriers, cultural misperceptions, and fear of deportation lead to under-reporting of crimes and avoidance of police.

1 The Policy Council recommends that the Washington State Sheriffs Association (WSSA) and Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs (WASPC) develop a model policy for building trust and fostering cross-cultural relations. This policy should include:

SUBREC | Creation of a Language Access Plan.

SUBREC | Development of an organizational self-assessment tool to measure cultural and linguistic competency and assist law enforcement agencies in reviewing their administrative capacity to work effectively with recently arrived immigrant populations.

SUBREC | A requirement that local police regularly work with and seek the opinions of immigrant community leaders/ community liaisons through the formation and use of an immigrant advisory board or working group.

SUBREC | Creation of a working group to create a model policy on bilingual recruitment and retention.

SUBREC | Availability of small stipends for language training for monolingual officers.

SUBREC | Pay differentials for bilingual employees.

SUBREC | Standard training, incorporated into existing requirements, for new sheriffs and police officers on cultural awareness, racial profiling, and building trust with immigrant communities.

SUBREC | Information outreach to the immigrant community by all law enforcement personnel (not just a department within the agency), conducted using materials in the immigrant's native language that explain community values, personal safety, scams, how to contact law enforcement and what to expect, local and state government, court process, child safety seats, bicycle safety, etc. These publications should be available at the Welcoming Center website (See Recommendation Three).

SUBREC | Conduct citizen academies that explain the inner workings of the law enforcement agency to help immigrant community members become familiar with how police officers

perform their duties and how the department serves the community.

1 The Policy Council recommends that the Governor convene a group of immigration advocates, law enforcement officials, and community members to develop model policies that prohibit state law enforcement agencies from inquiring about immigration status except in very limited circumstances. The Council also recommends that the Governor support the adoption of these policies at the local level in counties and cities across the state.

The issue of fear in immigrant and refugee communities of law enforcement, including perceptions of racial profiling, emerged many times during our deliberations. The Policy Council believes it is essential to address community perception of law enforcement as well as to ensure that law enforcement operate under guidelines and model policies to prevent racial profiling or other activities that undermine trust. Establishing standard policies and procedures that keep the distinction clear between local law enforcement and federal immigration agents is one component to maintaining trust and reducing fear.

1 The Policy Council recommends that the State launch a campaign or public education sessions to ensure that immigrant and refugee communities, law enforcement officials and state agencies are aware of U-visas and for the State to support efforts to facilitate increased access by community members to U-visas, which offer humanitarian protections when immigrants are victims of crime.

1 The Policy Council recommends that the State ensure that state-issued identification documents be accessible to immigrants—including undocumented immigrants—and refugees in order to ensure community safety. The Policy Council also urges the Governor to work with the Department of Licensing (DOL) to ensure compliance with the agency's no-discrimination policy and to also ensure consistent and fair treatment by DOL offices that serve high numbers of immigrants.

SUBREC | The Policy Council endorses Washington's policy of allowing all state residents to apply for driver licenses without requiring proof of lawful presence.

SUBREC | The January 2009 Department of Licensing Revised Standards and Procedures should be reviewed to see if the

new procedures have impacted the ability of refugees and undocumented immigrants to obtain driver licenses and, if necessary, the standards should be amended to embody a policy that ensures that refugees and undocumented immigrants are still able to access driver licenses. The recent changes deleted 34 previously accepted documents (and added four I.D. documents).

RECOMMENDATION SIX

Provide Immigrant and Refugee Professionals Pathways for Career Re-Entry

Many foreign-born residents of Washington State come to the United States with remarkable experience, skills, and often substantial professional careers behind them. Many hold advanced degrees in the fields of medicine, nursing, engineering, teaching, or other such professional fields. When they arrive, unfortunately, these professionals face numerous barriers to transferring their education, training or certifications to the U.S. marketplace, including institutional barriers around licensing procedures.

States have a tremendous amount of power in regard to professional licensing and providing legal immigrant and refugee professionals pathways for career re-entry. Recognizing the indispensable contributions of Washington's immigrant workforce to our state's economy, the Policy Council urges the State to reap the skill opportunities that professional foreign trained immigrants bring our state by facilitating pathways for career re-entry.

- 1 The Policy Council recommends that Washington State assist highly-educated and high-skilled immigrants and refugees to enter the workforce at a professional level through a variety of strategies including:

SUBREC | Compiling and making available region-specific information on job availability, wage rates, and clear, easy-to-understand instructions on how to acquire licensing, certifications, and credentials.

SUBREC | Expanding funding for projects that assist health care professionals and other needed professions.

SUBREC | Through the Governor's leadership, directing licensing boards and the State Apprenticeship Council to create work groups of professionals in high priority fields to determine how requirements for state licensing for specific

occupations can be altered to maintain the high standards promoted by licensing but ensure the utilization of skilled immigrants with previous training. This could include a pilot program such as the one proposed during the Tacoma hearing, where foreign professionals could spend a certain amount of time "apprenticing" to a trained professional in shortage areas. If completed satisfactorily, that apprenticeship could serve as part of the necessary requirements to obtain credentials to practice.

SUBREC | Encourage a partnership between the State and universities or community colleges to create an educational program similar to the Cuban school (see box in report) for skilled immigrants and refugees to help them transition into their trained fields.

SUBREC | Include a career guide for immigrant professionals as part of the proposed Welcoming Center website (see Recommendation Three).

RECOMMENDATION SEVEN

Celebrate Washington's Diverse Immigrant Communities

The diversity represented by immigrants is a source of joy and pride for Washington communities. Events that bring entire communities together—immigrant and non-immigrant—and recognize the value of the diversity in the global economy and community are empowering and build community.

- 1 The Policy Council recommends that the State establish key days or dates for celebration of immigrants in the State of Washington: specifically, we propose celebrating the September 17th Citizenship Day and June 20th World Refugee Day.

SUBREC | The Policy Council recommends that the Governor make a media proclamation tied to citizenship day that celebrates the contributions of immigrants to Washington State. New citizens from all over the world, proud to be Americans, could be highlighted. These celebration days can also be used as vehicles for getting important messages out to immigrants.

- 1 The Policy Council recommends that the State identify existing state campaigns that can allocate resources to a sub-media campaign that highlights the benefits immigrants and refugees bring to our state. This media

campaign could highlight prominent immigrant leaders and contributors, as well as new immigrants and refugees who are eager to enrich our community.

SUBREC | The Policy Council recommends the use of immigrant/refugee faces and stories in state materials that are used in media campaigns, including state websites, posters, tourism, etc. to reflect the diversity of our population.

RECOMMENDATION EIGHT

Advocate Actively on Key Federal Issues that Relate to Immigrant Integration

As the Policy Council considered how the State could best integrate immigrants it became clear that while there is much that can be done on a state level, some of the biggest opportunities to further immigrant integration must be advanced at the federal level. It is important for states, including Washington, to advocate actively for changes in federal policy that negatively impact the State's ability to effectively integrate immigrants. For example, states do not have jurisdiction around federal immigration policies that determine who comes in to the United States and who stays here, but the effects of a failed immigration system are clearly felt at the state level by immigrant families, service providers, and key businesses for the State's economy, including agriculture and high-tech. How to integrate immigrants who lack status is one of our state's biggest challenges. As the State begins the work of implementing the Policy Council's recommendations, pieces of federal legislation that provide dollars for health care, ESL classes, naturalization, and adult basic education provide crucial resources for the task at hand.

When federal legislation so clearly impacts our state, the Policy Council recommends that the Governor engage actively in that discussion.

- 1 The Policy Council recommends that the Governor continue to publicly support and advocate for federal comprehensive immigration reform, working in closer coordination with coalitions of business, labor, faith and immigrant groups to enact successful comprehensive immigration reform. The Governor should support comprehensive immigration reform that promotes the reunification of families, provides legal status to undocumented individuals with a path to earned citizenship, addresses current and future worker flows, provides due process and civil

liberty protections, and encourages immigrant integration. The country needs legislation to enable employers to legally hire needed immigrant workers and that protects all workers, regardless of immigration status, from mistreatment by employers. Legislation must also support the full integration of immigrants by providing immigrants with quality English instruction, naturalization assistance, and opportunities to move up the economic ladder. Legislation should also provide legalization for students who came to this country as children and graduated from a U.S. high school, currently known as the DREAM Act.

- 1 The Policy Council recommends that the Governor work to ensure that immigrants have access to healthcare as part of federal healthcare reform. Specifically the Governor should advocate lifting the five year bar on federal healthcare benefits for legal permanent residents, qualifying these legal immigrants for programs like Medicaid and bringing in additional dollars to the State.
- 1 The Policy Council recommends that the Governor support and advocate for Strengthen and Unite Communities with Civics Education and English Skills (SUCCESS) Act of 2009, which recognizes the growing need for English literacy, U.S. history and civics education for immigrants.
- 1 The Policy Council recommends that the Governor advocate for the Workforce Investment Act Reauthorization, specifically for a revised funding formula that includes English Language Learner adults with a high school degree or higher.

RECOMMENDATION NINE

Continue the New Americans Policy Council

In this report the Policy Council has presented a wide range of recommendations and a plan for immigrant integration that can be implemented in the coming months and coming years. We have prioritized recommendations that would make a tremendous impact on immigrant integration and would increase the economic contributions of immigrants to our state. However, immigrant integration has many important component areas for which we simply did not have enough time or research to make final recommendations. We heard important testimony and began research in these areas but did not have sufficient time to complete recommendations. We

believe that several of these areas demand the State's attention and would benefit from the same Policy Council continuing its work for an additional year. This continuation would also give the Council the opportunity to work with state agency representatives to further develop and/or implement some of the recommendations.

- ❶ **The Policy Council recommends that the Governor continue the New Americans Policy Council to work with state agencies to implement year one recommendations and to address four primary topics including: Economic Development including Immigrant Access to Credit, Asset Building, and Immigrant Entrepreneurs; Worker Protections; Housing (homelessness to home ownership) and Safety Net Services; and Language Access and other issues in Courts and Medical Settings.**

The Council believes that we all benefit when Washington's immigrants work at their highest potential and engage responsibly in their communities and workplaces. In this framework, the public, private, and nonprofit sectors have an important opportunity to invest in assisting immigrants in the process of their integration so that we can bring them fully into our economy and our community, for the benefit of all. Historically and currently, the United States has flourished as a rich and diverse nation, embracing immigrants from all over the world who moved to our country to escape persecution and war, experience the freedoms and rights of a democratic society, better the lives of their families, contribute to the economy, and become naturalized citizens. The state of Washington continues to benefit and prosper from the cultural diversity, work ethic, and economic contribution that a diverse population has contributed to our state.

As Washington's foreign-born population increases, investing in the strategies recommended in this document will help ensure Washington State's vitality and well-being. Washington will continue its legacy as a state that cherishes, welcomes, helps integrate its immigrants into society, and sustains its diverse population and the economic growth resulting from that diversity.

This report and its recommendations reflect these beliefs. We call for state leadership to establish a new alliance of

employers, philanthropy, nonprofits and local governments to collaboratively implement these recommendations, including funding. We hope this report constitutes a fresh start for our dialogue on immigration that focuses on constructive solutions for a successful future.

NEW AMERICANS POLICY COUNCIL

Elizabeth Dunbar, *Chair, Tacoma* – Tacoma Community House

Pramila Jayapal, *Vice Chair, Seattle* – OneAmerica

Gilberto Mendoza, *Vice Chair, Pasco* – Small business owner

Akhtar Badshah, *Redmond* – Microsoft

Jorge L. Barón, *Seattle* – Northwest Immigrant Rights Project

Dmitri Chaban, *Spokane* – World Relief Spokane

Luis Fraga, *Seattle* – University of Washington

Troy Hutson, *Seattle* – Economic Services Administration at the Department of Social and Health Services

Ken Irwin, *Yakima* – Yakima County Sheriff

Jeff Johnson, *Olympia* – Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO

Van Dinh-Kuno, *Mukilteo* – Refugee and Immigrant Services Northwest

Hilary Pennington, *Seattle* – Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

Michael Ramos, *Seattle* – Church Council of Greater Seattle

Rick Sawyer, *Seattle* – UNITE HERE Local 8

Ezra Teshome, *Seattle* – State Farm Insurance