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## Massachusetts New Americans Initiative

An economic and social plan to help Massachusetts develop an integration-based agenda for refugees and immigrants and support for the communities where they live

The Massachusetts New Americans Initiative is a proactive multi-year civic engagement process to tap the vision and expertise of government, faith, business and community leaders to create a coherent immigrant policy for the Commonwealth. Working to integrate a social and global agenda, MassNAI will identify the interconnected policy measures that integrate immigrants and refugees, and create the opportunities that lead to economic success, greater civic engagement and promoting citizenship. The project will work for strategic policy solutions in these areas:

1. Assisting adult newcomers to quickly become fully contributing and integrated members of society by addressing barriers of language, skill transfer, citizenship status, and skill acquisition;
2. Assisting children of immigrants and refugees to maximize their potential and to play an important role in building a stronger and more diverse global Massachusetts;
3. Ensuring that immigrants and refugees can access the appropriate services and opportunities offered by the Commonwealth;
4. Supporting the efforts of higher education institutions to recruit and retain students from across the Commonwealth and around the world; and
5. Attaining a greater level of understanding of the needs and opportunities for cities and towns across the Commonwealth where these newcomers live.

### Impact of New Americans on Massachusetts economy

We are, as we have always been, a Commonwealth of recent immigrants and descendants of immigrants. The challenge is how well we can work together toward a shared vision of a brighter future.

At a time when the Commonwealth faces the possibility of a serious decline in population, immigrants make up over 14 percent of the Massachusetts population and 17 percent of our workforce. Without new immigrants who have come since 1980, there would have been a significant decline in Massachusetts' population and labor force. Regardless of their immigration status, immigrants play key roles as consumers, entrepreneurs, and workers.

The rapid increase in the Massachusetts immigrant population brings both benefits and challenges to the host communities and to the state. While 30 percent of recent immigrants have a college degree, 70 percent lack a high school diploma or GED, do not speak English at all or well, or lack the literacy skills for success in a knowledge-based economy. Conversely, University of Massachusetts Boston researchers found that immigrant entrepreneurs revived commerce in declining neighborhoods, provided much needed products and services, provided employment opportunities, and enhanced public safety in communities across Greater Boston.

## MassNAI Project Structure

MassNAI will work to create a public/private partnership that develops the Patrick Administration's proactive state immigrant integration agenda. An Executive Order from the Governor will lay out three key ideas to devise, implement and support the New Americans Initiative.

- A revived Governor's Advisory Council on Refugees and Immigrants and Office of Refugees and Immigrants (GACRI) with the expertise and depth to complete the research and analysis necessary to flesh out an integration-based agenda. The GACRI will be charged by the Governor to present recommendations in twelve months for an immigrant integration agenda for state government. The GACRI includes key community, business and academic leaders, as well as the participation of agency representatives to encourage inter-agency coordination.
- Expand and strengthen the Massachusetts Office of Refugees and Immigrants (MORI) to carry out the recommendations of the GACRI, and actively coordinate the Commonwealth's policies and programs for refugees and immigrants in partnership with other state agencies.
- A call for all state agencies and offices to develop implementation plans for those new policies approved by the Governor.

## Process

Over the course of one year, the MassNAI will engage key stakeholders across the Commonwealth on a range of issues impacting immigrants and refugees, and maximize the contribution that newcomers can make to their host communities and to state and local economies. These issues include, but are not limited to, citizenship and English acquisition (adult education); human services; healthcare; pre-k to 12 and postsecondary education; entrepreneurship and workforce development; and home ownership and housing.

### The Governor's Advisory Council on Refugees and Immigrants

Transformed to include policy and economic expertise, the Governor's Advisory Council on Refugees and Immigrants (GACRI) will serve as MassNAI's working group. From convening meetings across the Commonwealth to gather input from leaders in immigrant, business, faith, labor, as well as legislators, to reviewing research findings and drafting the policy plan itself, the GACRI will have a hands-on role in the project. The GACRI will also identify new representatives from various state agencies to participate and report at meetings for more coordinated services and policies for refugees and immigrants.

### The Massachusetts Office of Refugees and Immigrants (MORI)

MORI leadership will serve as the Governor's primary staff and liaison to MassNAI and as the primary coordinator for implementing the state's immigrant integration agenda across state agencies and secretariats. The office's traditional role since its creation in 1985 has been the management of refugee resettlement within the commonwealth and the coordination of a new citizenship program. MORI will continue to strengthen its work in refugee resettlement while adding a new policy and operational area to include immigrant integration and services.

### The Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition

MIRA will facilitate the MassNAI process, working closely with all stakeholders to ensure MassNAI meets milestones and generates final products. MIRA will also be responsible for working with a statewide network of ten community-based organizations to develop the project's grassroots outreach.

## Project Plan and Timeline

In July 2008, Governor Deval Patrick will sign the New Americans Executive Order officially launching this initiative. By Fall 2008, a revived Governor's Advisory Council on Refugees and Immigrants membership will be in place and begin holding a series of community meetings. The council's report with policy recommendations for a state immigrant integration agenda will be submitted to the Governor by July 2009.

The New Americans Executive Order also calls for state agencies and offices to develop New Americans plans for the implementation of those policy recommendations that are approved by the Governor by July 2010.