Sustaining VT's Future through S.56 & H. 375 (2025), the Office of New Americans (ONA) Bills

INTEGRATION BARRIERS UNDERMINING VERMONT'S IMMIGRANT WORKFORCE

- **VT needs more people,** and the 2025 *Vermont Economic Action Plan* includes the strategy of increasing "pathways for recruiting international migrants to Vermont."
  - **Immigrants are VT's fastest growing working age demographic** and vital to VT's economy and future. They are 80% more likely to start businesses and fill workforce gaps, boosting jobs and purchasing power.
  - **Immigrants contribute** about $226.3M toward Federal and State Taxes and $619.9M in spending power.
  - Without immigration, our **aging and dwindling workforce will continue increasing VT's cost of living**.
- **However,** despite their contributions, VT immigrants face significant challenges:
  - Licensing, education, and language **barriers limit immigrant workforce integration**.
  - **Fragmented services** create inefficiencies and block legal, social, and healthcare access.
  - Foreign-born **entrepreneurs lack culturally and linguistically appropriate resources** to grow their businesses and often need burdensome collateral and/or borrower investment to secure capital funding.

THE SOLUTION: LEGISLATE AN "OFFICE OF NEW AMERICANS (ONA)" EQUIVALENT THROUGH S.56 AND H.375

- **Nationwide, ONAs have bipartisan backing for their proven economic benefits for states**—streamlining immigrant services, centralizing information, and improving systems access for all foreign-born residents.
- As a result, ONAs **improve economic mobility, workforce integration, and overall social cohesion**.
- VT has already seen improved efficiency and outcomes across all three branches and the public thanks to the coordination and contributions of the **State Refugee Office at AHS, currently led by Tracy Dolan**. However, this **federally mandated, federally funded** office focuses narrowly on refugees and is at risk due to federal divestment.
- **Bipartisan-supported VT S.56 and H.375 (2025)** propose creating a cross-sector immigrant services council to:
  - Study barriers in **consultation with statewide entities** comprised of and/or serving immigrants.
  - Recommend an **ONA structure for VT** informed by best practices from existing ONAs in 20+ states.
- Following **successful ONAs in Maine, Massachusetts, and New York**, Vermont's ONA would:
  - **Coordinate** intake, referrals, grantmaking and service delivery across agencies and civil society.
  - **Provide** technical assistance to ensure state services are culturally competent and accessible.
  - **Serve** as a public advisory body to advance immigrant integration and economic growth.

LOW-COST PATHWAY TO S.56 AND H.375

- **Other states** that are already centralizing immigrant service coordination through an ONA equivalent report:
  - **Reduced redundancy and improved access** across state agencies and nonprofit providers.
  - Improved **cultural and linguistic support** and better policies advancing **integration and economic growth.**
- Since the first ONA Bill, S.194 (2024) was introduced, **Vermont has laid the groundwork for an ONA** equivalent:
  - **A $200,000 longitudinal study** by Vermont Poverty Law Fellow Maya Tsukazaki highlights systemic barriers and provides actionable recommendations for coordinated service delivery.
  - **Over 400 service providers convened** at Vermont's inaugural Welcoming New Americans Symposium and documented barriers and solutions to immigrant integration.
  - **Legislative action, like Act 105 (2024)** for immigration status-blind professional licensure, creates sound local solutions to federally spurred economic problems.
  - Resources like the State Refugee Office and the networks it convenes will make for a **cost-effective study.**

RETURN ON INVESTMENT FROM S.56 AND H.375

- An **ONA would drive economic growth, improve efficiency, and build a more sustainable Vermont.**
  - Immigrant integration will boost VT's economy by **filling labor shortages and driving entrepreneurship**.
  - Centralized intake and service coordination will **reduce duplication and maximize impact**.
  - For example, the 2019 *Economic Impacts of Civil Legal Assistance Programs Report* demonstrated a **$11 return to VT for every $1 spent** on quality, coordinated service delivery by maximizing residents' **spending power** and **reducing high costs relating to housing instability and emergency** healthcare and services.

BOTTOM LINE: **By passing S.56 & H.375, VT will join nearly half the states** in leveraging existing research, growing partnerships, and legislative momentum to secure Vermont's long-term economic growth through coordinated workforce integration.