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POLICY BRIEF

[New York State's Innovative Efforts to Ensure Successful Immigrant Integration]

No more than three (3) pages, Times New Roman, font size 12, single-spaced

Summary

As home to approximately 4.4 million immigrants, New York State prides itself on being a global pillar of inclusivity and opportunity. Governor Andrew M. Cuomo solidified New York State's position as a leading model of inclusion by establishing a series of programs that facilitate the economic and civic integration of the state's immigrants through a network of neighbourhood-based organizations and public-private partnerships. The Governor has stated that "our state works for all people, regardless of where you were born or what language you speak...we are proud that people from all around the world call New York home, making our state a beacon of diversity and tolerance."

Context

New York's rich history is rooted in welcoming and nurturing immigrants and refugees, who have helped establish a socially vibrant and economically prosperous state. More than one in four residents of working age in the state are foreign-born, and through their work, they contribute to the progress, economic stability and overall well-being of New York. Governor Cuomo is a proud advocate of these immigrants and deploys innovative integration models to serve their needs and help them contribute further to our communities. Today, Governor Cuomo has redoubled his efforts to protect the rights of all immigrants.

Timeline

- In 2011, Governor Andrew M. Cuomo **suspended New York's participation in the federal Secure Communities Program** to ensure protection of vulnerable populations when they interact with State law enforcement.
- In 2013, Governor Cuomo recognized the need for an official state-level office dedicated to helping new Americans integrate into New York State life. The Governor signed into law Chapter 206 of the Laws of 2014, which laid out the powers and duties of the **Office for New Americans (ONA)**. ONA has the proud distinction of being the first state-level immigrant office created by statute in the United States.
- In 2014, Governor Cuomo signed into legislation the **Immigration Assistance Services Enforcement Act (IASEA)**, which makes immigrant assistance services fraud a felony and protects New Yorkers from immigration scams.
- In 2016, Governor Cuomo launched "**NaturalizeNY**," a program designed to assist up to 2,000 eligible green card holders apply for U.S. citizenship by covering naturalization application fees and providing legal assistance throughout the



naturalization process. In addition to investing \$1.5 million to cover federal fees, the NaturalizeNY campaign increases awareness of naturalization criteria and opportunities to New Yorkers. The second round of this campaign was announced in May 2017.

- As part of his 2017 State of the State address, Governor Cuomo proposed the “**We Are All Immigrants**” Initiative to protect the legal rights of immigrants and to support them on their path to U.S. citizenship. As part of this initiative, \$10 million was secured in April 2017 for the **Liberty Defense Project (LDP)**. This project will provide legal assistance and representation to New York’s immigrants in need, regardless of their status.
- In May 2017, through a partnership between ONA, The Central American Refugee Centre, and the Children’s Village, Governor Cuomo launched the first-in-the-nation **parent support program for families caring for unaccompanied and/or undocumented immigrant children**.

Model

The Office for New Americans operates through a network of 27 not-for-profit and community-based Opportunity Centers. With a presence in over 14 cities, ONA delivers legal assistance, English-for-Speakers-of-Other-Languages (ESOL) classes, community workshops, and resources for immigrants to start or grow their own businesses.

NaturalizeNY and the Liberty Defense Project are both initiatives that utilize public-private partnerships. NaturalizeNY’s voucher lottery is administered by ONA in partnership with Robin Hood, New York Community Trust, Stanford University, George Mason University, the State University of New York at Albany, and various media organizations. The higher education institutions taking part in NaturalizeNY are also studying the overall effects of citizenship on the lives of legal permanent residents. ONA’s participation in this research project will be beneficial to the design and enhancement of its services.

Similarly, the Liberty Defense Project is rooted in a strong partnership between the New York Department of State, two dedicated philanthropic allies—the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Ford Foundation—and a state-wide coalition of advocacy organizations and legal entities. Coordinating legal services through this coalition will guarantee broad coverage for immigrants in need across the state.

Main Findings

All state-level immigration efforts require utilization of partnerships to capitalize on existing trust between constituents and local community organizations as well as to ensure that services reach even the most remote locations. Additionally, collaborations with academic institutions have provided rigorous data to inform sound policy-making in this arena.

The Governor’s approach to immigration protection and inclusion has positively impacted the lives of numerous New Yorkers. Among other achievements, the State has seen:



- Nearly 150,000 immigrants assisted by the ONA Opportunity Center network through its wide range of services, including: the ONA Hotline; English-for-Speakers-of-Other-Languages training; naturalization and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals assistance; information, training and referrals on federal immigration law and policies; and business development training.
- More than 10,400 naturalization applications were submitted to the federal government as a result of naturalization drives and civics classes held throughout New York State.
- More than 770 immigrant farm workers received English instruction through Cell-ED, ONA's award-winning cell phone program that teaches English remotely.

The success of this model is tied to the development of strong partnerships in various industries and the focus on targeted outreach: cell phones for remote areas, online event marketing, and confidential in-person legal assistance.

Best Practices

New York State has become a national leader in immigration inclusion and opportunity under the tenure of Governor Cuomo. Positive contributions by immigrants, illustrated by the economic revival of upstate cities through small business creation, entrepreneurship, and community reinvestment, have demonstrated that a focus on protecting civil rights and developing job readiness is beneficial to the health of the State.

Basing the delivery of services to immigrants in community-based organizations and on public-private partnerships has the double positive effect of yielding quality service delivery and building a trust-based relationship with immigrants in the State. In effect, by contractually partnering with other organizations, New York State has been able to access the 'best in field' and their pre-established and trusted service delivery mechanisms.

New York State empowers and provides opportunity to its immigrants so they can contribute to the State's economy and their communities. Governor Cuomo will continue his unmatched dedication to the immigrant community by instituting programs that protect and empower those who seek to achieve the American Dream in New York State.

