

January 27, 2023

Rep. Timm Ormsby
Chair, Appropriations Committee
Washington State House of Representatives
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

Sen. Christine Rolfes
Chair, Ways and Means Committee
Washington State Senate
Olympia, WA 98504-0466

Via Electronic Mail

Re: Request for Increased State Support for Immigration and Naturalization Assistance

Dear Rep. Ormsby and Sen. Rolfes,

We write as organizations serving or representing communities throughout the State to ask you to prioritize investments in immigration and naturalization assistance in the upcoming 2023-2025 biennial budget. We are grateful for the leadership you have shown in making Washington State a welcoming state for immigrants and refugees and we urge you to continue to invest in ways that further that value.

We are grateful that our State has already created an infrastructure to provide immigrant and refugee communities with the assistance they need to attain U.S. citizenship through three critical programs: the Washington New Americans and the DSHS Naturalization programs support people who are lawful permanent residents seeking to obtain U.S. citizenship; and the Legal Support and Community Safety program in the Department of Commerce supports immigration legal assistance to individuals who are not lawful permanent residents but can obtain permanent immigration status in the U.S.

However, each of these programs serves only a fraction of the people who need assistance to gain permanent immigration status and U.S. citizenship. We are therefore asking you to include in the final biennial budget increased investments for each of these programs as outlined below:

Program	SFY 2023 Level	Governor's Proposal	SFY 2024 Request	SFY 2025 Request
DSHS Naturalization Program	\$2.546 M	\$2.545 M	\$3.5 M	\$4.5 M
Washington New Americans Program (Dept. of Commerce)	\$1.25 M ¹	\$1.0 M	\$2.0 M	\$2.75 M
Legal Support & Community Safety (Dept. of Commerce)	\$4.0 M	\$2.0 M	\$8.0 M	\$10.0 M

We were disappointed that Governor Inslee's budget proposal did not continue an allocation of \$2 million that the Legislature approved as an addition to the Legal Support and Community Safety program

¹ Since 2017, WNA has received \$2 million per biennium. However, there was an underpayment of \$250,000 in SFY22, which was made up in SFY23 and led to that year's budgeted amount being \$1.25 million.

in the SFY 2023 supplemental budget last year. This additional funding was dedicated to support services for newly-arrived individuals and families who had been paroled into the U.S., including thousands of Afghan and Ukrainian community members who are seeking to stabilize their immigration situation after escaping conflict and persecution in their home countries. There is still an urgent, ongoing need to support these community members and we urge you to restore this funding.

However, merely maintaining the level of funding from SFY 2023 is not sufficient to address the urgent needs for services among immigrant and refugee communities. The increased investments requested above are necessary for the following reasons:

- In addition to the Afghan and Ukrainian community members referenced above, our state has welcomed thousands of asylum seekers from other regions in the past year. Most of these asylum seekers are placed in deportation proceedings through which their asylum claims will be reviewed and the number of these cases in our region has grown significantly. In fact, the number of new deportation cases filed in the Seattle immigration court (which covers most of Washington State) reached an all-time high of over 8,000 in the 2022 federal fiscal year (which ended in September 2022). The pace is even higher for the 2023 federal fiscal year, with new cases filed projected to exceed 11,000 at the current pace.
- There is no right to appointed counsel for adults, families, or even children undergoing deportation hearings. Of the over 23,000 pending deportation cases at the Seattle immigration court, over 11,000 of them (nearly 50%) do not have an attorney representing them.
- These new needs came on top of an existing demand for immigration assistance that already far exceeded the current service capacity. And we anticipate that the need may grow even further if current legal attacks on the DACA program lead to the termination of that protection for thousands of DACA recipients residing in our state.
- An estimated 230,000 Washington residents currently have permanent residence and are eligible to become U.S. citizens but have not been able to naturalize. And all of the organizations that provide naturalization services across the state are at capacity, particularly in light of rising costs to provide services. Many have created waitlists or are simply rejecting requests for assistance.
- Barriers to citizenship and legal status include lack of access to information, lack of trusted sources for information, lack of access to technology, inability to afford private legal counsel, high filing fees (with increases expected under a proposed new federal regulation), language access, high cost of living at the expense of pursuing legal status or citizenship, and more.
- Washington State has fallen behind our fellow western states in the level of support at the state level for immigration and naturalization assistance. Both Oregon and California have recently invested significantly more per year on a per capita basis on supporting these services: Oregon has invested more than \$50 per non-citizen residing in their state and California approximately \$18. Washington currently invests only \$13 per year per non-citizen residing in our state, and this is including the additional funding added last year to support new arrivals.

Washington, as a welcoming State, should help our immigrant and new citizen communities thrive and be safe, especially when the federal government has failed to create pathways to legal status and citizenship. The increased investments we are requesting will not only benefit tens of thousands of immigrant and refugee residents of our state and their families but will also accrue benefits to the state and its economy. Research has shown that when people are able to obtain [permanent immigration](#)

[status](#) and [U.S. citizenship](#), their income levels grow, leading to increased investments within communities and higher tax revenue.

We urge you to prioritize increasing funding for these important programs in the biennial budget. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you need additional information.

Sincerely,

APIC South Puget Sound (SPS)

APIC-Yakima

Asian Counseling and Referral Service

BIPOC ED Coalition

CAIR-WA

Casa Latina

Catholic Charities Eastern Washington

Central Washington Justice For Our Neighbors

Chinese Information and Service Center (CISC)

Colectiva Legal del Pueblo

Columbia Legal Services

Community Visions

Economic Opportunity Institute

El Centro de la Raza

Fair Work Center

Hispanic Disability Support SWWA (Pasitos Gigantes)

Immigrant and Refugee Ministry, Archdiocese of Seattle

Indivisible Skagit

Indivisible Vashon Immigrant/Refugee Rights Group

Inland Northwest Unitarian Universalist Community

InterIm CDA

Jefferson County Immigrant Rights Advocates

Jewish Coalition for Immigrant Justice NW

Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation

Jewish Family Service
Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)
Kitsap Immigrants Assistance Center
Latino Civic Alliance
Latino Community Fund of WA State
LIFT
Literacy Source
Lutheran Community Services Northwest
Manzanita House
MAPS-AMEN (American Muslim Empowerment Network)
Mi Centro
Multicultural Self-Sufficiency Movement
Neighborhood House
Northwest Harvest
Northwest Immigrant Rights Project
Northwest Health Law Advocates
OneAmerica
Pacific County Immigrant Support (PCIS)
Pacific Islander Community Association of Washington
Pierce County Human Services Coalition
Refugee and Immigrant Connections Spokane
Refugee & Immigrant Services Northwest
Refugee Women's Alliance
SEAMAR Community Health Centers
Seattle Immigrant Rights Action Group
Seattle Indivisible
Spokane Immigrant Rights Coalition
St. James Cathedral Immigrant Assistance
Strengthening Sanctuary Alliance

Tacoma Community House

The West African Community Council

Ukrainian Community Center of Washington

Vashon-Maury SURJ (Showing Up for Racial Justice)

Washington Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers

Washington Defender Association

Washington Immigrant Solidarity Network (WAISN)

Washington West African Center

Wenatchee for Immigrant Justice

Yakima Immigrant Response Network

Cc: Members of the House Appropriations Committee
Members of the Senate Ways and Means Committee