



Immigrant & Refugee Offices & Committees Throughout the United States

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Despite the growing numbers of refugees and immigrants in the United States, there remain few city or state funded offices targeted at providing services to this population. The states with the largest refugee and immigrant communities, California, New York, Florida, Texas and Illinois, have historically maintained offices or committees to address refugee/immigrant issues. Some offices, like those in Boston and Maryland, are specifically targeted to the needs of refugee and immigrant newcomers. Others, like in Miami, service a broader population of people, under which refugee and immigrant needs are addressed. Funding for these positions varies. Many receive a combination of state, federal, and private funds, but there is little precedent set for city funding. Nashville, for example, receives almost 100% of their funding from ORR in Washington and therefore the office is restricted to providing services to only those individuals with refugee status, and not immigrants. While there are a number of statewide offices, there are few smaller scale city offices established to address the needs of the refugee/immigrant community. The office of Minority Affairs in Wausau, Wisconsin is an exception. Wausau, like Lowell, is a small city that grew rapidly in the 1980's due to immigration. It is one of the few cities that has an office housed in City Hall to speak to the needs of their growing immigrant/refugee populations.

More often, as researchers at the Immigrant Policy Project discovered, states develop limited-term, legislation specific committees or task forces to address particular immigrant issues. Below is an alphabetical list of state and city refugee/immigrant offices and task forces compiled and researched by Danielle Vacarr at the ONE Lowell Coalition and from the following research by Ann Morse at the Immigrant Policy Project: State and Local Coalition on Immigration. "State Immigration Offices and Committees", by Ann Morse. National Conference of State Legislatures, February, 2002. (Note: a revised version is published at www.stateserv.hpts.org under immigrant Policy.) State and Local Coalition on Immigration. America's Newcomers: Community Relations and Ethnic Diversity, by Ann Morse and Jonathan C. Dunlap. Issue Paper No. 4, Denver: National Conference of State Legislatures, April 1994.

Arizona's Ad Hoc Committee on Immigration was created by the Senate President and House Speaker in August 2001 to examine the impact of immigration policies and practices on Arizona's county governments including health delivery systems, environmental protection, criminal justice and law enforcement. A written report is due on Dec. 15 and is scheduled to expire on December 31, 2002. Arizona has a total population of 5,130,632 and a foreign born population of 656,183 (12.8%).

California: the California Joint Committee on Refugee Resettlement, International Migration and Cooperative Development, created in 1973, and fell victim to a 1991 budget crisis. Later there was an Assembly Select Committee on Statewide Immigration Impact (1993); and a proposed, but not

enacted statewide Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs. Currently, the Little Hoover Commission, comprised of members of the state senate and assembly, holds conferences and workshops to determine how to best meet immigrant needs. California has a total population of 33,871,648 and a foreign born population of 8,864,255 (26.2%).

The County of Santa Clara in California conducted an 18 month long study on a needs assessment of the county's refugees and immigrants with surveys, focus groups and questionnaires. The findings were reported in a December 2000 "summit" on immigrant needs and contributions, with implementation to come in the year 2001. Participants in the conference included advocates, county officials, school district leaders, and members of the high tech community. Recommendations were made for economic empowerment; education; family support; health issues; and legal issues. Santa Clara County has a total population of 1,682,585 and a foreign born population of 573,130 (34.1%). See the articles, *We The People: Helping Newcomers Become Californians* (Report #166, June 2002) at <http://www.bsa.ca.gov/lhc.html> and "*Bridging Borders in Silicon Valley*".

Florida: The Community Development office for the city of Miami coordinates and implements programs funded through federal and state grants and other funding sources to assist the city's economically disadvantaged residents and neighborhoods(although it is not aimed specifically at refugees and immigrants). Through cooperative partnership with the public and private sectors, the Department oversees housing, economic development, social programs, public improvements, immigrant transition assistance, employment and training, and other community programs designed to provide low-income city residents access to sharing in the economic growth and prosperity of the region. Miami has a total population of 362,470 and a foreign born population of 215,739 (59.5%).

Georgia: Governor Barnes has appointed members to commissions on Asian and Hispanic affairs to serve as a bridge between immigrant communities and government offices. A county health summit was held in February 2002 to help guide the county's five year health and human services plan. Georgia has a total population of 8,186,453 and a foreign born population of 577,273 (7.1%).

Illinois: The Illinois Immigrant Policy Project Roundtable Initiative has a steering committee composed of resettlement agencies, the state Department of Human Services, state Department of Education, immigrant organizations, researchers, and foundations that convened four roundtables on 1) immigration policy and law; 2) workforce issues; 3) education; and 4) health and human services. In previous years, the Illinois Immigrant Policy Project supported 8 studies on topics such as a profile of Chicago's immigrant community; estimated costs of providing welfare and education; citizenship needs; public service use; and how immigration is revitalizing America's Midwest, among others, that influenced Illinois' legislative,

administrative and private sector responses to the needs of immigrants. Illinois has a total population of 12,419,293 and a foreign born population of 1,529,058 (12.3%).

Illinois: The Commission of Human Relations in Chicago is a self-described city counterpart to the Civil Rights Agency or Anti-discrimination agency. The commission serves as a liaison between the city government and refugee and immigrant residents in designing programs to help implement anti-discrimination laws. The commission is city funded and is housed in a city office, but does not provide any direct services to refugees and immigrants. Chicago has a total population of 2,896,016 and a foreign born population of 628, 903, 217 (21.7%)

Iowa: In Iowa the Community Work Group of the Governor's Strategic Planning Council established a Subcommittee on Diversity/Immigration to examine issues related to immigrants: some of the action items include protecting immigrants/refugees from exploitation; creating a handbook for immigrants; and creating model community programs. (Iowa's Governor initiated a refugee resettlement project with the U.S. Dept. of State in the mid-1970s, preceding the federal Refugee Act of 1980 that launched a nationwide refugee resettlement program.)

Maryland: Maryland has an office called the Office of New Americans (MONA), which is located within DHS in Baltimore. "The MONA provides support services to refugees to ease their transition into American society and serves as a resource to the Governor and General Assembly on refugee and immigrant policy. Working through a public/private network of dedicated service providers, MONA plans, administers, and coordinates transitional services aimed at helping refugees become self-sufficient as quickly as they can. Preparing refugees for the American working environment is a priority. Inducting the newcomers into the subtleties of American culture is also important. MONA service providers instruct refugees on life skills, familiarizing them with such daily routines as how to shop at the supermarket, manage a budget, take public transportation, keep their money in banks, register for the draft, or call 911 for emergencies." Maryland has a total population of 5,296,486 and a foreign born population of 518,315 (9.8%). www.dhr.state.md.us/mona/

Massachusetts: In 1998 Boston established The Mayor's Office of New Bostonians to respond to the growing immigrant and newcomer communities in Boston. It is a city office that promotes the economic, civic and social integration of newcomers into American society while at the same time increasing public understanding and appreciation of the contributions of immigrants. This office, directed by Reverend Cheng Imm Tan, is located in City Hall and all workers are city employees. Boston has a total population of 589,141 and a foreign born population of 151,836 (25.8%). <http://www.cityofboston.com/newbostonians/default.asp>

Massachusetts: The Massachusetts Office for Refugees and Immigrants was established in 1985 to assist refugees in adjusting to life in the Commonwealth of

Massachusetts. The Office supports programs for refugees and immigrants, acts as their public advocate, coordinates state and federal services on refugees' behalf, and works to make mainstream programs linguistically and culturally accessible to refugees and immigrants. <http://www.state.ma.us/ori/>

Nebraska: The Nebraska legislature passed LB 1363 in March 2000 establishing a 15-member task force of on the "productive integration of the immigrant workforce population." Membership included public and private members with legislators, executive agencies, meatpacking industry reps, schools, health care and community organizations. The task force reviewed public services, including education, health care, and housing; defined the function of the state in working toward the integration of immigrants and their new communities; and identified effective programs. In October 2001 the task force issued a best practices report. "The Dream Lives On: New Immigrants/New Opportunities for Nebraska". Legislation was introduced January 2002 to create a "State Newcomer Policy". Nebraska has a total population of 1,711,263 and a foreign born population of 74,638 (4.4%)

New York: New York Task Force on New Americans - created in 1987 to consider immigrant employment and civic rights; terminated in 1993 for budget reasons; and later recreated by a senior assemblyman from Manhattan (Brian Murtaugh). The New York Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force holds conferences to meet with representatives from the Hispanic community to create an agenda for legislators to take to the state capital in Albany. New York State has a total population of 18,976,457 and a foreign born population of 3,868,133 (20.4%). New York City has a total population of 8,008,278 and a foreign born population of 2,871,032 (35.9%).

New York: New York Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs. Originally created in 1984 by the New York City Department of City Planning to help newcomers adapt to life in New York City, the office now is part of the Mayor's office and became a cabinet-level office in 1996. Its mission is to encourage the full and active participation of immigrant New Yorkers in the political, economic, social and civic life of the city. The Office also works to ensure that the needs of immigrant communities are being served through linguistically and culturally competent services. <http://www.nyc.gov/html/imm/home.html>

Oregon: Portland has an office called the "City Refugee and Immigrant Coordination Program". Established in 1980 as a small office in City Hall originally attached to the Mayor's office, it is now a one person position run by Paul Duong (Vietnamese). Oregon has a total population of 529, 121 and a foreign born population of 68,976(13%).

Tennessee: The Nashville Refugee Services Program provides Employment Services, Social Adjustment and English Language Training to refugees/asylees who have been in the United States less than five years. While the Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County pays some salaries and provides office space, 90% of funding comes from ORR. (\$1 million annual budget for combination of Refugee Social Services, Targeted Assistance and the Elderly Refugee Project). As such, they cannot provide any direct services to non-refugee immigrants, who comprise 90% of the newcomer population of Nashville. Tennessee has a total population of 1,231,311 and a foreign born population of 57,614(4.7%)

Texas: Governor Ann Richards and the Texas legislature created the Governor's Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs in 1991 to "understand and address the needs of the immigrant/refugee population and to facilitate the self-sufficiency and social integration of Texas' immigrant/refugee population and foster and understanding and appreciation in the state's cultural diversity." The office became part of the State Department of Human Services in FY 1994/1995. Texas has a total population of 20,851,820 and a foreign born population of 2,889,642 (13.9%).

Utah: Offices of Asian, Hispanic, and Polynesian Affairs, created by the governor in 1996 to review state policies and programs for their impact on ethnic communities, help state agencies improve responsiveness citizens in those communities, and inform citizens about available government services. Simultaneously, Governor Leavitt created the Utah Asian, Hispanic, and Polynesian Advisory Councils to serve as liaisons between the ethnic offices and communities. All of the above entities fall under the Agency for Community and Economic Development. Utah has a total population of 2,233,169 and a foreign born population of 158,664 (7.1%).

Wisconsin: During the 1980's Wausau, Wisconsin experienced rapid demographic growth due to a large immigrant influx. Two years ago leaders in the city including the County Administrator and the Mayor, as well as refugee and immigrant community leaders began a community visioning process called Wausau 2000. This gave birth to the position of Director of Minority Affairs housed in City Hall. Originally funding was provided by the city, but more recently the position was written into a federal grant from the Department of Education. It has only been in place for a year and has support from both the "receiving" and "affected" communities. Wausau has a total population of 38,000 and a foreign born population of 5,321 (Hmong: 4,700, Lao: 513) Population estimates provided by Sue Levy, the State Refugee Coordinator.

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All demographic data from Census 2000.