

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2024 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader - Revised

House Bill 961

(Delegate Taveras, *et al.*)

Health and Government Operations

Education, Energy, and the Environment

State Government - Commission on New Americans - Established

This bill establishes a Commission on New Americans, staffed by the Office of Immigrant Affairs to measure and report on the contributions of new Americans to the State and the availability of government services for new Americans. By October 1, 2026, and at least once every five years thereafter, the commission must report to the Governor and the General Assembly. The report must include (1) a quantitative report detailing the contributions of new Americans and the services available to new Americans, as specified; and (2) a qualitative report measuring customer satisfaction and identifying any gaps in the services available to new Americans, as specified. A member of the commission may not receive compensation but is entitled to reimbursement for expenses under standard State travel regulations. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2024.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The Office of Immigrant Affairs can provide staff for the commission using existing budgeted resources. Any expense reimbursements for commission members are expected to be minimal and absorbable within existing budgeted resources. Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: The bill is not anticipated to materially affect local government operations or finances.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: “New American” means an individual (1) who is a resident of Maryland; (2) whose country of origin is a country other than the United States; and (3) who is not a citizen of the United States, or who has recently become a naturalized citizen of the United States. “Second generation American” means an individual who (1) was born in the United States and (2) is the child of a new American.

The commission comprises 1 member of the Senate, appointed by the President of the Senate; 1 member of the House, appointed by the Speaker of the House; and 15 members appointed by the Governor that have expertise in specified areas. Of the members appointed by the Governor, at least 5 must be new Americans and at least 4 must be second generation Americans.

Current Law: Chapters 674 and 675 of 2021 established the Governor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs. The office must advise the Governor on matters relating to immigrants in Maryland. Specific responsibilities include:

- establishing a network of neighborhood-based opportunity centers that provide immigration services to immigrants;
- increasing access to English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs;
- assisting immigrants in matters relating to immigration status, including assisting with the naturalization process and applications for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals;
- connecting immigrants to business resources that use immigrants’ skills, employment referral programs, and other workforce development programs;
- developing and leveraging immigrants’ skills to benefit the immigrants’ communities and the State;
- strengthening the connection between immigrants communities through civic engagement;
- reducing exploitation of immigrants;
- establishing a toll-free, multilingual hotline and a website for purposes including disseminating information about the programs and services offered by the office, referring for services, and receiving complaints relating to fraud and other related crimes against immigrants;
- ensuring that individuals referred by the office are directed to persons who are in compliance with the Maryland Immigration Consultant Act, or authorized by the Federal Office of Legal Access Programs;
- using information developed by the office through the hotline, to assist law enforcement in combating crimes against immigrants;

- advising the Governor and the director concerning matters affecting immigrants in the State in order to promote and encourage the full participation of immigrants in the State’s civic and economic life;
- coordinating with other State agencies and otherwise using the resources of the State to serve the needs of immigrants; and
- encouraging and assisting local governments in the development of activities to enhance civic engagement among immigrants and in immigrant communities.

By June 15, 2022, and annually thereafter, the director must submit a report to the Governor and the General Assembly describing the activities of the office, including (1) summaries of calls and queries received through the hotline and website; (2) information on ESOL programs provided by the office; (3) the estimated or exact number of immigrants assisted through opportunity centers; (4) the status of any workforce development programs; and (5) any other relevant information. As of March 2024, the office has yet to submit an annual report to the General Assembly.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Governor’s Office; Department of Budget and Management; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - March 6, 2024
km/jc Third Reader - March 19, 2024
Revised - Amendment(s) - March 19, 2024

Analysis by: Thomas S. Elder

Direct Inquiries to:
(410) 946-5510
(301) 970-5510