



*March 7, 2024*

*To: Chair Pena-Melnyk and Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee*

*From: Victoria Francis, Deputy Director, State & Local Initiatives, American Immigration Council*

***RE: Support for HB 961: State Government - Commission on New Americans - Established***

Dear Chair Pena-Melnyk and members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee,

My name is Victoria Francis, and I am the Deputy Director of State and Local Initiatives at the American Immigration Council (the Council), an organization that works to advance positive public attitudes toward immigrants and create a more welcoming America—one that provides a fair process for immigrants and adopts immigration laws and policies that take into account the needs of the U.S. economy.

I am submitting this letter to express the Council's support of HB 961: State Government – Commission on New Americans – Established for establishing the Commission on New Americans to study and periodically report on the contributions of New Americans and the availability of government services for New Americans. This measure will allow the state to more fully understand the role New Americans play in the state and their importance to the success of all Marylanders.

My organization has worked with leaders in government, business, and civil society across the country to recognize the crucial role immigrants play in state and local economies and their vital role in some of the fastest-growing and most in-demand fields. To remain competitive and meet critical workforce and economic needs, states must work to understand the current contributions of New Americans, their untapped potential, and the availability of services to help these individuals meet their full potential. HB 961 creates a mechanism to do just that.

To help illustrate why the need for this legislation is so important, my organization has conducted quantitative research on the demographic contributions and economic impact of the more than 970,000 New Americans who call Maryland home. What we found is striking<sup>1</sup>:

- **As of 2021, Maryland is home to more than 970,000 immigrants, making up 15.7 percent of the state's population.** These New Americans are critical to addressing the state's workforce shortages across the skills and education spectrum, with 79.5 percent of immigrants in Maryland being of working age (ages 16-64) compared to 61.4 percent of their U.S.-born counterparts and one in five immigrants holding a bachelor's degree or higher.

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<sup>1</sup> Available at <https://map.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/locations/maryland/>

- **Immigrants in Maryland paid \$13.3 billion in taxes** — including \$4.8 billion in state and local taxes — and held \$33.1 billion in spending power that can then be reinjected back into the state’s economy.
- **Maryland’s Immigrant population fills critical workforce needs.** In 2021, New Americans accounted for 28.4 percent of entrepreneurs, 23.4 percent of STEM workers, and 23.0 percent of nurses in the state.
- **Immigrant entrepreneurs in Maryland are an important part of the economy.** In 2021, there were over 80,000 New American entrepreneurs in the state with a combined business income of \$2.0 billion.

As the data above illustrates, New Americans are vital to Maryland’s workforce, economy, and culture. A commitment by the state to continue to study and report on the contributions of New Americans and understand what services are available to them will allow the state to support the successful integration of newcomers while also addressing workforce needs and advancing policies that support the success of all Marylanders. I encourage the Committee to support the passage of HB 961.

Thank you for your consideration,

Victoria Francis  
Deputy Director, State & Local Initiatives  
American Immigration Council