

Section 10. Concluding Thoughts and Potential State-Level Coordination and Planning Opportunities

from

All in for a Thriving Connecticut

Opportunities to Support Upward Mobility for the State's Immigrant Families

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10 Concluding Thoughts and Potential State-Level Coordination and Planning Opportunities

Taking stock of the snapshots of issues, challenges, and opportunities presented in this report, it is natural to consider whether there are benefits to establishing processes or structures to understand and address them in a coordinated way—particularly those that intersect with multiple policy and program areas.

Such efforts could more broadly build the state’s capacities to analyze and address immigration and integration impacts on Connecticut’s economy, service systems, and local communities, and facilitate more effective responses to issues that cut across state agencies or levels of government.

In fact, many states have taken steps to study issues affecting their immigrant families, coordinate efficient responses to particular needs, and/or create standing capacity within their governments to build expertise and lead responses as needed.

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- ▶ **Creation of a state Office of New Americans (ONA).** Such offices exist in more than 15 states. Their placement within state bureaucracies varies, with some located within governors’ offices and others in state economic development, social services, health, or other agencies, often with a dotted-line report to the governor. Their roles typically include coordinating state agency responses to integration and immigration policy issues and advising the governor and agency executives on newcomer community and state agency concerns. Maine is the most recent state to create an ONA; launched in early 2025, it is situated within the Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation and the Future. Its priorities focus on workforce pathways and entrepreneurship support for immigrants, improving coordination among organizations supporting immigrants, and expanding and strengthening English language acquisition opportunities.²⁷⁶ The creation of Maine’s ONA was a key element in the state’s ten-year Economic Development Strategy,²⁷⁷ which was created using an intensive public engagement process with the goal of charting a course for addressing long-term workforce and economic development needs.
- ▶ **Formulation of a New Americans Agenda.** Created by the state legislature in 1992, the Massachusetts Office for Refugees and Immigrants is one of the older state offices focused on newcomer concerns. In 2008, recognizing the importance of immigrant families to the state’s future growth and prosperity, Governor Deval Patrick issued an executive order seeking to better address

²⁷⁶ Maine Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation and the Future, “[Maine Office of New Americans](#),” accessed May 20, 2025.

²⁷⁷ Maine Department of Economic and Community Development, “[Maine’s Economic Development Strategy](#),” accessed May 20, 2025.

integration needs.²⁷⁸ He empaneled the Governor’s Advisory Council for Refugees and Immigrants, directing it to work with the Massachusetts Office for Refugees and Immigrants and the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition to oversee a unique statewide research and consultation process charged with identifying ways to ensure full inclusion of immigrants and refugees in the state’s economic and civic life. This led to publication in 2009 of a *New Americans Agenda*,²⁷⁹ which contained scores of recommended state actions organized under 12 topic areas. The agenda’s influence is evident to this day in ongoing efforts to expand and improve the state’s English language acquisition programs, support entrepreneurship, and broaden state pathways for recognition of professional degrees and training obtained outside the United States (including an economic development bill signed by Governor Maura Healey in late 2024 that provides a new licensure pathway for internationally trained physicians²⁸⁰).

- ▶ **Coordination of language access initiatives across state agencies.** The extremely diverse nature of modern immigrant and refugee arrivals means that many state and local agencies must be prepared to address potential language barriers affecting speakers of various languages in their public-facing activities. This is both a practical matter, as states seek to protect public health and safety, as well as a requirement under federal civil rights law,²⁸¹ which seeks to ensure language barriers do not prevent individuals from accessing information or services to which they are entitled. Rather than have individual agencies or major programs within them develop individual translation and interpretation services policies and, for example, negotiate contracts with Language Line or other such entities to deliver these services, roughly ten states and dozens of localities have set an overarching policy and provide varying levels of coordination for these services. Policies in states such as New Jersey,²⁸² New York,²⁸³ and Massachusetts²⁸⁴ typically set standards for such services, require development of language access plans by state agencies and their major programs, and create coordination and technical assistance resources to guide agency efforts. Additional important goals of these laws and policies are achieving cost reductions and contracting efficiencies, given the ability of higher levels of government to aggregate demand across agencies and negotiate lower contract rates for services.

Taking steps to improve the state’s knowledge, foresight, and coordination capacities related to integration and immigration policy concerns is arguably especially important at this particular moment in the state’s and the country’s history. Rapid, large-scale changes in federal government policies, program designs, and funding have unfolded since President Trump’s second term began in January 2025. These changes, brought by executive orders, congressional action, and historic reductions in federal agency staffing, contracts, and funding, will be felt by communities across the country.

278 State of Massachusetts, “*Integrating Immigrants and Refugees into the Commonwealth*,” *Massachusetts Register* 1109, Executive Order No. 503 (July 9, 2008).

279 Governor’s Advisory Council for Refugees and Immigrants, *Massachusetts New Americans Agenda* (Boston, MA: State of Massachusetts, 2009).

280 State of Massachusetts, *An Act Relative to Strengthening Massachusetts’ Economic Leadership*, Acts of 2024, Chapter 238 (November 20, 2024).

281 See Title VI of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, Public Law 88–352, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 78 (July 2, 1964), amending U.S. Code Title 42, Chapter 21, Subchapter V, “*Federally Assisted Programs*,” accessed July 15, 2025.

282 New Jersey Division on Civil Rights, *2025 Language Access Plan* (Trenton: New Jersey Division on Civil Rights, 2025).

283 State of New York, “*Language Translation Services*,” *Laws of New York* Chapter 18, Article 10, Section 202-A (2022).

284 Massachusetts Department of Public Health, *2024–2025 Language Access Plan* (Boston: Massachusetts Department of Public Health, n.d.).

Policymakers and system leaders in Connecticut, as in all U.S. states, will likely spend years attempting to rework service designs and financing mechanisms for their major health, education, and other service systems as they adapt to new federal program approaches and funding realities. At the same time, the president's goal of mass deportation of unauthorized immigrants has left many Connecticut immigrant families living in fear of separation, while those with lawful status and even U.S. citizenship face uncertainty as their extended families, communities, and livelihoods are affected by the changing policy climate in the country. The state's employers and businesses, large and small, also face new concerns as uncertainty about the future availability of workers for a wide range of jobs settles in.

In light of the critically important roles immigrants and their families play in maintaining the state's vitality and future economic competitiveness, state and community leaders will need to find ways to weave solutions to integration policy concerns such as those presented in this report into relevant policy and system designs. Fortunately, the state has a good deal of control over the systems that support upward integration trajectories, so while federal actions may undermine or negatively affect state efforts, their ultimate success is still largely in the state's hands. This is not the case with immigration policies, where the federal government holds the determinative role. Looking to the future, however, improved state knowledge and foresight on integration and immigration needs and impacts could position Connecticut well to shape and even leverage future immigration policies, should they align with state economic development and integration goals.