

Thank you, Chair and members of the committee,

We are testifying in support of HB21-1150 which seeks to establish the Office of New Americans within the Department of Labor and Employment to help support immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in our State.

The Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition (CIRC) is a statewide, membership-based coalition of immigrant, faith, labor, youth, community, business, and ally organizations founded in 2002 to improve the lives of immigrants and refugees by making Colorado a more welcoming, immigrant-friendly state. We believe that the creation of this office will build upon current efforts to successfully integrate and include immigrant and refugee communities all over Colorado; a value we continuously work towards upholding.

Immigrants and refugees are an essential part of the fabric of our state. Over half a million immigrants and refugees call our state of Colorado their home. They contribute greatly to our economy and are integral members of our communities; they are our peers, co-workers, and members of our faith communities. As taxpayers, immigrants contributed one and a half billion dollars to Colorado in 2018.

The creation of this office would serve as the central contact point for state agencies and organizations serving immigrant individuals concerning immigrant and refugee issues in our state. This would further work towards the goal of successfully and effectively welcoming immigrants by prioritizing the creation and implementation of a statewide strategy to promote economic stability and successful economic, linguistic, cultural, and social integration of the immigrant community in Colorado.

Everyone deserves the opportunity to access all the services and resources provided by the state of Colorado. No one should be excluded from succeeding and advancing in a state they call their home due to economic, cultural, or linguistic barriers. Colorado has the opportunity to work together and collaborate to bring about a state that welcomes all immigrants and refugees.

HB21-1150 will not just bring about benefits to the immigrant and refugee community, it will also allow the state to thrive and prosper.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition

**Marissa Molina, FWD.us Colorado State Director**  
**Testimony in Support of [Create the Colorado Office of New Americans \(HB21-1150\)](#)**  
**Senate Finance Committee – May 19, 2021**

Good afternoon members of the Senate Finance Committee. I want to thank the committee for this holding this important hearing on an issue that directly impacts the lives of many who call Colorado home.

My name is Marissa Molina and I serve as the Colorado State Immigration Director for FWD.us. I'm a proud Coloradan, an immigrant, and an American.

Thanks to in-state tuition legislation, I was able to attend college in Colorado and have been able to give back to my community as an educator and now as an advocate. I have also had the honor of becoming the first DACA recipient to be named by the Governor to serve on the Board of Trustees at Metropolitan State University of Denver. I am a living example of what happens when you give all Coloradans an opportunity to reach their full potential and when policies are designed to uplift all of us regardless of where we come from and what language we speak.

For the last two years, I have been working with community groups across the state of Colorado and the I-Drive coalition to improve access to the SB251 driver's license program. Despite this legislation passing in 2013, accessing a license has continued to be a challenge for many immigrants in our community, preventing them from accessing the benefits this body intended them to receive. I've heard from many Coloradans who have shared the difficulty they've faced in trying to access a public benefit that should already be theirs by law. Thanks to the hard work of community groups partnering with the DMV and continuously troubleshooting issues in the implementation of this program, more than 150,000 Coloradans have been able to apply for driver licenses. With these licenses, a myriad of employment opportunities have been opened, allowing immigrants the opportunity to build a better life and keep their families together.

Establishing an Office of New Americans will create an opportunity for Colorado to scale collaboration between community organizations, New Americans, and the state government in such a way that all our policies can truly make the impact that they were intended to create.

Immigrants are already a critical piece of Colorado's economy. For example, each year Colorado's immigrants pay more than [\\$4.1 billion in federal taxes](#) and [\\$1.7 billion in state and local taxes](#). They also have an annual spending power of [\\$15.6 billion](#) which is poured back into our economy. As we emerge from the pandemic, it will be critical that we provide proper support to those who are strengthening the economy. With support that accurately meets the needs of immigrant communities, we can multiply the incredible impact they are already having.

To that end, COVID-19 has highlighted the ways in which government services and information can improve to ensure equitable reach to all communities, as well as the disparate impact that COVID-19 has had on the immigrant community. It has never been more clear than during this pandemic that when our communities are not able to access the information or resources they need, it impacts everyone.

Immigrants, who comprise [nearly 10%](#) of our state's health care workers, including doctors, registered nurses, and home health aides, have done their part during the pandemic. They are fighting every day on the frontlines in service to our continued health response and our state's long-term economic recovery -- even as many remain uncertain about their futures in the country they call home. Now, Colorado can continue to do its part as well.

By establishing the Office of New Americans, we can help ensure that here in Colorado, legislation is implemented equitably and that all Coloradans, regardless of where they were born, their immigration status or preferred language, have access to resources and opportunities to achieve their full potential. Thank you.

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JEWISH COMMUNITY RELATIONS COUNCIL



Senator Brittany Pettersen, Chair  
Senator Jeff Bridges, Vice Chair  
Senate Finance Committee

Diana Zeff Anderson, Chair  
Colorado Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC)

May 19, 2021

Support for HB21-1150, Create The Colorado Office Of New Americans

I write to you on behalf of the Jewish Community Relations Council, a policymaking coalition of 38 Colorado-based organizations and 15 at-large members that advocates on the Jewish community's behalf on priority issues.

Last month, the Colorado Jewish community – along with Jews around the world – concluded our Passover holiday, a celebration that includes retelling the story of our ancestors' redemption from slavery in Egypt and the beginning of a forty-year sojourn in the desert. In this retelling, the Israelites of the past and today's modern Jews are instructed by Moses, "And you shall not mistreat a stranger, nor shall you oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 22:20). The stranger here refers to "a person who was not born in that country but has come from another country to sojourn there."

Through much of our Jewish history, we have been the stranger in a strange land. It is this historic experience that inspires us to help the stranger in our own community. For this reason the JCRC asks you to vote in support of the creation of the Colorado Office of New Americans.

As of 2019, Colorado's immigrant population is estimated to be more than 540,000 – almost 10% of our state's populations. As our economy grew significantly, and now as it begins its recovery as we make our exit from the COVID-19 pandemic, immigrants played and will play essential roles. The Office of New Americans can play a critical role in helping those new arrivals acclimate to living in our state, helping connect them with potential employers, gain new skills, and connect them with important support services.

By extending this welcoming hand, we can make life better not just for new immigrants in our state but for all Coloradans.

Thank you for your consideration.

Diana Zeff Anderson, JCRC Chair



Rose Community Foundation was created in 1995 from the proceeds of the sale of Rose Medical Center, a beloved hospital founded after World War II by the Denver Jewish community – a community of immigrants themselves. Rose’s founders envisioned a hospital built on the values of inclusion and non-discrimination and employed staff regardless of race or creed, granting hospital privileges to Jewish doctors and doctors of all backgrounds, including Dr. Edmond Noel, the first Black physician to have hospital privileges in Denver. While Rose Community Foundation is separate and independent from the hospital, the shared ethos around inclusion, non-discrimination and diversity has continued to infuse the Foundation’s work over the past quarter century as we have aimed to advance inclusive, engaged and equitable Greater Denver communities through values-driven philanthropy.

Over the past several years, as our community has been impacted by shifts in the federal immigration policy landscape, escalating discriminatory rhetoric and troubling upticks in hate crimes, Rose Community Foundation has deployed the tools we have at our disposal—our grantmaking dollars and our voice—to support organizations on the frontlines of serving our immigrant and refugee neighbors, with the aim of ensuring our community feels welcoming and safe for all. We have been proud to support Greater Denver nonprofits such as African Community Center, Intercambio, Jewish Family Service, Littleton Immigrant Resource Center, Lutheran Family Services and International Rescue Committee, which are addressing the need for welcoming and integration services by providing resources, education, programming, and other supports that help immigrants and refugees settle in and connect to their new community.

But these nonprofits cannot do this work alone. An Office of New Americans would be an important centralized hub for connecting immigrants with these organizations, state services and community-based programs that help individuals reach their full potential and achieve successful integration. The office would help state agencies and the various community stakeholders throughout Colorado work collaboratively to address issues that prevent newcomers from thriving, a mission that we should all share.

After all, the successes of new Americans in Colorado are inextricably linked with our state’s broader successes. Immigrants and refugees power our economy; nearly one in eight Colorado workers is an immigrant and more than 100,000 Coloradans are employed at immigrant-owned firms. They also contribute to the diverse culture of our state by introducing new ideas, customs, cuisines, and art.

Rose Community Foundation proudly joins our partners in the business, nonprofit and public sectors who aspire for Colorado to continue to strengthen its commitment to being a welcoming and inclusive state for all by supporting HB21-1150.