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## Refugee and Immigration Advocates Applaud Bill to Create a Colorado Office of New Americans

**(Denver, Colorado, April 8, 2021—For immediate release):** Refugee and immigrant advocacy groups applaud the introduction of [HB21-1150](#) by Representative Iman Jodeh (HD41) to create a Colorado Office of New Americans, which will be heard today by the State, Civic, Military, and Veterans Affairs Committee.

The Office of New Americans will create a much-needed structure for state agencies to work collaboratively to promote the successful economic, social, linguistic, and cultural integration of immigrants in Colorado. The office, which will be housed under the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, will be a driver of state-wide integration efforts and will provide Colorado with a comprehensive plan for achieving the successful integration of immigrants.

It will uplift Coloradans' newest neighbors and ensure that they, the organizations that serve them, and the communities that welcome them are equipped to succeed. The Office of New Americans will be vital to providing support and resources to the broader community and immigrant-serving organizations in Colorado as we work together to make Colorado a better place to live and work for all.

Immigrants, including refugees, make up nearly 10% of Colorado's population. They are vital to the state's cultural fabric and its economy. More than that, they are our neighbors, first responders, teachers, healthcare workers, small business owners, service industry workers, and leaders.

In 2019 Colorado launched its [New American Integration Initiative](#). It was a vital first step to coordinate efforts to identify and address issues relating to immigrant integration. The Office of New Americans is the logical and necessary next step to continue this work to foster enhanced inclusion of New Americans and recognize the important role they play in helping Colorado thrive.

**Jennifer Wilson, Executive Director of The International Rescue Committee in Denver (IRC) said:** "An Office of New Americans is the next step in Colorado's commitment to being a more inclusive state that benefits all Coloradans. Since we opened our doors in 2016, the IRC in Denver has served over 1,500 individuals from more than 55 nationalities. We have welcomed refugee families fleeing war and violence, supported Special Immigrant Visa recipients rebuilding their lives in our community, helped asylum seekers access legal services, and

provided rehabilitative services to survivors of torture. The work we do as a community-based organization to help immigrants navigate systems, find employment, become self-sufficient, and integrate into their new community does not happen in isolation. It takes the whole community. We see the obstacles immigrants face and the many ways they enrich our state. There is need for more and better coordination among state agencies, offices, and departments, together with immigrant communities, the organizations serving them, and local communities—coordination that will contribute to a building stronger Colorado where all are welcome and have the opportunity to thrive.”

**Lisa Taylor, Executive Director of the Immigrant and Refugee Center of Northern Colorado said:** "Establishing the Office of New Americans is a manifestation of our state's ongoing commitment to equity and a Colorado that works for all. The ONA will undoubtedly further enhance and strengthen the work of multiple agencies who serve our Coloradans who are immigrants. Collaborative efforts aimed at healthy integration have been unfolding for years, and the Office of New Americans is a crucial next step in ensuring that those efforts are coordinated and resourced to make the most meaningful impact."

**Mathew Mengesha, Policy Advocate for Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning said:** "Growing up the son of a refugee, it often fell on my small shoulders to assist my mother with things like translation and filing paperwork. I'm excited that The Office of New Americans will support Colorado's newly arrived neighbors along with their children by relieving kids of the overwhelming responsibility of being a family's de facto cultural navigator."

**Ron Buzard, Managing Director of ECDC African Community Center of Denver said:** "The Office of New Americans will benefit all Coloradans. Through the enhanced coordination of strategic services, the inclusion and integration of refugees and immigrants will be advanced. These advancements will improve the entire states' social, civic and economic life."

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## Notes to editors

[International Rescue Committee in Denver \(IRC\)](#) is a nonprofit humanitarian organization that works in the U.S. and around the world to help people whose lives and livelihoods have been shattered by conflict and disaster as they survive, recover and regain control of their future. The IRC is one of nine national resettlement agencies that partner with the U.S. Department of State and Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) to resettle refugees through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. IRC also partners with the Colorado Refugee Services Program to provide holistic services that promote refugees' successful integration in Colorado communities. The IRC in Denver opened in 2016 and has since served more than 1,500 refugees, Special Immigrant Visa recipients, asylees, Cuban entrants, asylum seekers, immigrants, and primary and secondary survivors of torture.

[Immigrant and Refugee Center of Northern Colorado](#) works on Empowering refugees and immigrants, connecting communities, and advocating for successful integration. In 2017, the Immigrant and Refugee Center of Northern Colorado began as a combined operation between Right to Read of Weld County and the Global Refugee Center. Becoming one, larger organization made sense for a variety of reasons, but it was the opportunity to provide further services to our clients that made the decision easy. Rather than providing English language training to some clients and Community Navigation services to others, we knew that we could be reaching everyone by making our services into one efficient, effective process.

**Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning** Founded in 1979, Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning is a nationally recognized provider of effective intercultural learning programs and services. It is a nonprofit, community-based organization working to build brighter futures for individuals and foster more inclusive organizations.

**Refugee Action Coalition of Colorado (RACC)** stands united to advocate for and with refugees, to promote a welcoming community and advance opportunities where refugees thrive. RACC was created by a group of individuals and organizations that recognized a need for public policy analysis and political advocacy specifically on issues impacting the refugee community.

**ECDC African Community Center of Denver (ACC)** is a refugee resettlement agency providing a wide range of comprehensive services to newcomers in the Denver metro area. Founded in 2001, ACC helps refugees and immigrants rebuild safe and sustainable lives. Throughout its history, ACC has resettled refugees from around the world, and has delivered services that empower individuals, families and entire communities to successfully navigate the challenges they face on their journey to achieve wellbeing and integration. Last year, ACC directly impacted the lives of 1,239 individuals who received those services.