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Senate Activity Report

Immigration Office To Oversee Attraction Policy Development

The new Office of New Americans will allow the state to develop coordinated policies that could attract immigrants to the state, and becoming an EB-5 visa center could allow the state to seek out immigrants, administration officials said.

Immigration was a major emphasis in [Governor Rick Snyder's](#) State of the State address. He noted that iconic Michigan companies like Dow, Meijer and Masco were founded by immigrants.

"We need to focus on legal immigration and make people know that Michigan is the most welcoming place," Mr. Snyder said. "If someone has the opportunity to come to our country legally, let's hold our arms open and say come to Michigan. This is the place to be."

The office, to be established by executive order, will be located in the Executive Office to give it that centralized planning power, Snyder advisor Bill Rustem said.

"It can come up with strategies and programs and policies to attract immigrants," he said.

And those efforts range from bringing in workers to harvest crops to getting graduate students to remain in the state rather than return to their home country, he said.

The proposal echoes a plan offered by House Democrats last year ("Governor says he will create a new Michigan Office for New Americans!! It was part of our immigration package from Spring," [Rep. Sam Singh](#) (D-East Lansing), one of the sponsors of that package, said on his Twitter feed).

That legislation would create the Office of Immigration Integration to coordinate services for those seeking citizenship. But the package ([HB 4617](#), [HB 4618](#), [HB 4619](#) and [HB 4620](#)) would also require the state to issue identification cards to those who came to the state without visas as children and are now seeking to remain.

The Hispanic/Latino Commission of Michigan and the Michigan Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission both praised the plan.

"The Michigan Hispanic/Latino Commission supports Governor Snyder's plan to create the Michigan Office for New Americans - part of a comprehensive effort to encourage immigrants to come to Michigan, stay in Michigan, create jobs in Michigan, and build a life in Michigan," Gilberto Guzman, chair of the commission, said in a statement.

"Michigan is home to people from all corners of the globe, and immigrants drive an increasingly significant share of Michigan's business activity. Michigan's Asian and Latino business owners alone realize sales of more than \$11 billion annually and employ more than 84,000 people," Jamie Hsu, chair of the Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission, said. "The Michigan Office for New Americans will help ensure that all of Michigan benefits from the strong work ethic and entrepreneurial spirit that motivates so many immigrant families and makes them such a vital part of our state."

But Mr. Guzman said it would take more than a new state office to attract immigrants. "We must do more to make sure that all people feel welcome in every part of Michigan society - in our schools, stores, restaurants, and neighborhoods," he said. "The governor's plan to open Michigan's doors to immigrant families will only work if they know they'll be treated with the respect and dignity all people deserve."

Part of the new office's job will also be convincing at least some current residents that immigrants are wanted, Mr. Rustem acknowledged.

"There's going to have to be an education component," he said. "We've got to get people to understand there's a difference (between legal and illegal immigrants)."

The administration's effort will also run up against some federal policy issues, Mr. Rustem said. In some cases, those graduate students want to remain, but are required to go back because they cannot get visas that will allow them to stay after they graduate.

The state has already applied for EB-5 center status that would allow the state to provide some of those visas, Mr. Rustem said. The request is being reviewed by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, he said, and the administration has sought assistance from some members of Congress to push that process along.

But the effort will also allow the state to find places where federal policies interfere with economic development. "The office is likely to advise some changes to federal policy," he said.

The state's involvement could drive some of those changes, the Michigan Catholic Conference said.

"By elevating the importance of the issue by way of his State of the State Address, Governor Snyder has made clear that immigration is a topic that cannot be ignored either at the state or federal level. Proposing an Office for New Americans is an innovative idea that will help elevate the competitiveness of Michigan," the group said in a statement. "As discussions of this proposal move forward, Michigan Catholic Conference is mindful of the fact that all persons, regardless of citizenship, must be respected for their inherent human dignity. To this point, we urge Congress to address comprehensive immigration reform sooner rather than later and for the Michigan congressional delegation to contribute toward its passage."

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124 West Allegan Street, Suite 1200, Lansing, Michigan, 48933

Phone: 517-482-3500 **Fax:** 517-482-4367 **Email:** gongwer@gongwer.com