

JUSTICE IN AGING

FIGHTING SENIOR POVERTY THROUGH LAW

Email To: mbx.who.taskforcefornewamericans@who.eop.gov

Subject Line: New Americans Task Force

Date: February 15, 2023

Submitted via email to mbx.who.taskforcefornewamericans@who.eop.gov

Dear Task Force Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to give written feedback on the importance of New Americans rights in the context of older adults. Justice in Aging writes in response to the Task Force on New American's request for input to inform the work and recommendations of the Task Force, with a focus on the unique needs and interests of older New Americans.

Justice in Aging is an advocacy organization with the mission of improving the lives of low-income older adults. We use the power of law to fight senior poverty by securing access to affordable healthcare, economic security, and the courts for older adults with limited resources. For 50 years, we have used the power of law to fight senior poverty by securing access to affordable health care, economic security, and the courts for older adults with limited resources. Our mission is to secure the opportunity for older adults to live with dignity, regardless of financial circumstances—free from the worry, harm, and injustice caused by lack of health care, food, or a safe place to sleep. We focus on the needs of low-income communities that are most marginalized and excluded from justice such as women, people of color, LGBTQI+ individuals, and people with limited English proficiency.

Question 1: What tools, mechanisms, or partnerships should the U.S. government establish to help New Americans integrate into our nation's workforce?

As older New Americans arrive in the United States, the federal government has a precious opportunity to support tools that have proven effective in the delivery of services to older New Americans. This includes intentional coordination of community involvement, especially in the forms of additional funding toward outreach, education and partnerships for New American older adults. In our experience, older adults, especially those older New Americans who may have faced trauma leaving their home countries, will likely feel more comfortable receiving information from luminaries within their communities. In outreach efforts to reach New Americans, it is therefore imperative that the government include older adults from these communities as trusted messengers. Older New Americans may still need to work to stay out of poverty, so the government must also include outreach on workplace rights, including protection from discrimination on the basis of age. In addition to the need to educate older New Americans on their workplace rights, other potential topics could include language access protections and familiarizing New American communities with federal and state public benefits programs to allow them to integrate more easily into their new country, including the

Washington, DC



Los Angeles, CA



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complicated rules around [Medicare eligibility for immigrants](#). Coordinated partnerships with luminaries trusted in the community on these important topics will maximize the impact of our outreach.

In addition to outreach from trusted messengers, the Task Force should consider a variety of tools, like radio, television, mailers, the local barbershop, or the local *Mercado* to provide information about resources that help New American older adults and other New Americans to integrate. Many older adults, including New Americans, prefer to receive information in print or through in-person dialogue. In addition to in-person messaging, the Task Force can consider leveraging in-language social media to also reach an intergenerational audience of New Americans. Targeting the full community allows for more potential New Americans older adults and other New Americans to stay linked to services.

Another tool the government should consider is continued funding of on-the-ground efforts to provide needed services for New American older adults. Without sufficient funding, older New Americans may not get access to much-needed services because demand could outpace supply. Furthermore, insufficient funding could create a revolving door of advocates interacting with New American older adults, making it harder for older adults to transition and integrate in their new country. Sufficient funding, for services like legal aid, would increase retention of skilled attorneys and other advocates and allow them to continue to bring essential services to the communities where there is ongoing need. Funding is needed for employers to support language access growth for employees and their families. Furthermore, while the trend is increasing toward digital services and outreach, in our experience in-person community support allow organizations to build rapport, trust, and community with older adults, including New Americans.

Services might look different for each community. However, providing funding for outreach and partnerships with trusted community organizations at the local level will better allow for New American older adults to integrate into the community. This should also include funding for the large network of aging services providers, even if they do not traditionally serve New American communities, because they have unique expertise working with older adults generally, and the services they offer, e.g. home-delivered meals, case management, and more, would be invaluable for older New Americans transitioning to life in the United States, regardless of whether they are part of the workforce. Funding – with explicit requirements to serve New American communities – would be an opportunity for the array of aging service providers to innovate and better meet the needs of more diverse communities.

Question 2: Should the federal government focus primarily on language access for a short list of most spoken languages among New Americans, or should the government focus instead on language access for less spoken languages where there are fewer resources available to New Americans who speak those languages (e.g., Indigenous languages, some Chinese dialects, etc.)

Language access is a right enshrined in federal law. The struggles to adjust to largely English-speaking country for New Americans is an ongoing challenge. We should never pick and choose who should have access to support. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. 2000d *et. seq.*, requires meaningful access for individuals with limited English proficiency, usually in the form of written translations and oral interpretation. Therefore, regardless of whatever direction the Task Force decides with respect to which languages to focus on, all New Americans with limited English proficiency should be afforded meaningful access to federally funded programs and services as required under the law. This is particularly true for older New Americans who may experience more difficulty learning English in their advanced age and who live in communities where the demand for English learning classes outstrips supply.

Instead of an approach that requires the Task Force to pick and choose among many different languages, we encourage the Task Force to consider adopting an approach based on targeted universalism.¹ Targeted universalism asks policymakers to set a universal goal and then craft targeted strategies for particular communities to reach said goal. It acknowledges that not every community will need the exact same solutions. In this case, the government should pursue a targeted universalist approach to broaden language access by determining what specific language communities need in terms of language access, the universal goal.

In addition, we hope the question of language access for New Americans provides the Task Force an opportunity to revisit the issues surrounding language access in programs serving many older adults, like Social Security, Supplemental Security Income, Medicare, and Medicaid. These programs feature inconsistencies in how they offer language access to the consumers they serve. For example, different documents are translated depending on the program, and there is no standard list of translated languages across programs. Even more variety exists in which websites offer non-English languages and how much information they include. Streamlining these programs for consistency and creating greater access for individuals with Limited English Proficiency is critical in better serving older New Americans.

Finally, we note that for true integration of older New Americans, the Task Force must consider [lifting the five-year bar](#) established under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), that greatly restricts immigrant access to federal public benefits. For older New Americans and others, these benefits are a lifeline to transition to a new life in the United States.

Thank you for the opportunity to give feedback on New Americans with an emphasis on older adults. If any questions arise concerning this submission, please contact Archie Roundtree Jr. at aroundtree@justiceinaging.org.

¹ John A. Powell, Stephen Menendian, Wendy Ake, [Targeted Universalism Policy and Practice](#), Othering & Belonging Institute at UC Berkeley, 7, 7-8 (May 2019) at <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/2022-12/Targeted%20Universalism%20Primer.pdf>

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of stylized initials followed by a long horizontal line.

Denny Chan
Managing Director, Equity Advocacy