“The Impact of Immigration on States and Localities”
Congressional Testimony of
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Madam Chairwoman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about the effects of immigration on states and localities. My research focuses on comparative metropolitan settlement patterns and the responses of local communities to immigration.

My comments today will focus on three interrelated areas.

- How settlement patterns of immigrants have shifted during the past 15 years, and how many areas with no history of immigration are experiencing recent and rapid influxes.

- How although states and local areas have no control over who enters the country, local institutions and leadership shape the prospects for immigrant integration.

- Finally, drawing on existing models, I will suggest a role for the federal government in helping states and localities with immigrant integration through funding to coordinate public policy explicitly and strategically aimed at immigrants.

As Congress continues to debate federal immigration reform, states and localities will deal on their own with many issues that they view as the responsibility of the federal government. The elements of immigration reform must include border and interior enforcement, an employment verification system, new worker program, visa reforms, and an earned legalization program. I will make the case that there should be a federal program that helps states and localities with immigrant integration so it is not left entirely in their hands.

The New Geography of Immigration

As of March, 2005 an estimated 35.7 million immigrants (of all legal statuses) were living in the United States. Due to changes in labor markets, today's immigrants, both legal and illegal, are increasingly settling outside well established immigrant gateways in a new group of cities and suburbs. Prior to the 1990s, immigrant settlement had a predictable pattern and was limited to mostly Southwestern and coastal states and metropolitan New York, Los Angeles, Miami and Chicago. By century's end, many places with virtually no history of immigration were attracting immigrants.

The swiftness of the influx in areas that historically have not accommodated large numbers of immigrants has caused social and economic stress. Especially in rural areas, small towns, and suburban areas, the institutional structures that could assist in the integration of immigrants–both community and governmental–are insufficient or nonexistent. Local leaders are grappling with the costs to institutions where immigrant newcomers have the greatest impact, such as schools, hospitals, and public safety departments.

Many large metropolitan areas as well as small towns and rural areas saw a doubling or more of their foreign born in the 1990s alone. The root causes of new trends in settlement are mixed. In the latter half of the 1990s, some metropolitan areas experienced robust economic growth, thus creating new job opportunities for immigrant (and US-born) newcomers. In other places, refugee resettlement appears to have increased foreign-born residents and also spurred on subsequent migration. A third factor is the internal movement of foreign-born U.S. residents, for instance the outflow of immigrants from Los Angeles to other metropolitan areas in the region in search of a lower cost of living. Underlying all of these trends are social networks of information about jobs and housing that inform the decisions immigrants and refugees make on where to reside.

Newly emerging immigrant gateways are drawing immigrants in record rates. Some of the fastest growing places are in the southeast such as Atlanta, Raleigh-Durham, and Charlotte, and other new metropolitan destinations are in the southwest, for example, Dallas-Fort Worth, Phoenix, and Las Vegas. Several northwest metro areas like Seattle, Portland, and Sacramento have re-emerged as immigrant gateways after having waned as immigrant destinations during the second half of the 20th century. Most of these areas have seen their immigrant population grow three or four fold as a result of new immigration in the past 20-25 years (see Singer 2004).

This period marked another new immigrant settlement trend—one taking place wholly within metropolitan areas—the suburbanization of immigration. As the urban economy has shifted from manufacturing to new economy services, the suburbs have become the preferred location for dispersed commercial and office space. As immigrants have followed the opportunities, including jobs and housing, they are now breaking with historical patterns and moving directly from abroad to areas outside of central cities in great numbers. This represents a departure from the past, when the pattern was more likely to be that immigrants moved to cities where housing and jobs were plentiful, and where they found others from their own background. The end of the 1990s marked the first time that the suburbs surpassed cities as the primary place of residence among the foreign born.

While immigration is largely an urban experience in the contemporary United States, a growing number of immigrants are also choosing small towns and rural areas. A recent study by Penn State sociologist Leif Jensen noted that immigrants are finding opportunities in agriculture, food processing, and other manufacturing in rural counties particularly in southeastern states. They are also settling in western areas with tourism-based economies and rural areas on the outskirts of larger, more immigrant-heavy areas. Immigrants in rural areas are often more noticeable and can elicit strong reactions, and the infrastructure to receive them is often nonexistent (Jensen 2006).

State and Local Reception of Immigrants

This week, Farmers Branch, a suburb of Dallas, voted into law an ordinance that makes it against the law for landlords to rent to illegal immigrants. This is not the first municipality to introduce such a measure – several localities around the country have patterned new laws like this one after similar measures in Hazleton, Pennsylvania. The Farmer's Branch law is emblematic of the frustration that many local public officials feel about the lack of federal reform and represents just one way they are choosing to take action.

There has been a proliferation of state and local laws, ordinances, proposals, and practices around immigration in very recent years. The National Conference of State Legislatures reports that as of April 2007, all 50 states are considering immigration-related bills – over 1,100 pieces of legislation or nearly twice the number they considered in all of last year. They include:

-41 states have 199 bills related to employment, most of them restricting the employment of unauthorized workers or addressing eligibility for workers' benefits.

-39 states have 149 bills addressing state benefits and services to immigrants. Many of these bills would restrict services, but some broaden benefits to specific immigrant groups.

-30 states have 129 bills around law enforcement issues, either those that would authorize local law enforcement to work with federal immigration authorities or the opposite: those that prohibit local law enforcement from doing so.

-30 states have 105 bills dealing with education issues related to participation in educational programs, some restrictive, some inclusive, including bills around eligibility for in-state reduced tuition costs.

In addition to state level reforms, countless local jurisdictions have introduced laws related to immigrants, focusing on issues such as day labor sites, language, employment, rental housing, and local law enforcement. Other communities are using laws already on the books—like residential zoning and housing ordinances—to attempt to curb the increase of immigrants or force them out. Growing intolerance towards illegal immigration—and growing frustration with the lack of federal movement on immigration reform—often drives local officials towards greater enforcement of ordinances that may deflect immigrants elsewhere and show that they are responding to public pressure.

These new policies are in part a result of the new geography of immigration, and the rapidity with which immigrants are appearing in new communities. City, county and municipal officials are feeling pressure to "do

something" about immigration. The result is that local governments are creating their own *de facto* immigration policy.

Not all of the local policy changes are restrictive or punitive; some places have developed new policies and passed ordinances that accommodate immigrants, such as publishing material in languages other than English or maintaining local services for all immigrants regardless of legal status. However, it is worth noting that many of the most restrictive measures have been developed in areas with little or no prior experience of immigration.

Although many of these new laws may be legally challenged and eventually struck down, they stir up local debate and create an uncomfortable environment for immigrants, even those who are here legally.

Thus in the absence of federal policy, we can expect that state and local officials who are feeling the pressure to take action will continue to develop their own strategies for dealing with immigrants. Regardless of how the current immigration reform debate is resolved, they still have the day-to-day responsibility of integrating immigrants in neighborhoods, local labor markets, and schools.

A "New Americans Initiative"

Federal immigration policy all but ignores the fact that immigrants settle into local areas. Big picture policy issues like border enforcement and the visa allocation system are national level concerns. But immigrants are not evenly distributed across the nation; they live in cities, counties, towns, and neighborhoods. They attend local schools, work in local firms, shops, and factories, join local religious congregations, and they access state and local services. Localities have no control over who enters the country, or who lives in their communities, but they assert significant influence over how immigrants are incorporated, socially, economically, and civically.

Immigrant integration is an overlooked aspect of the immigration policy landscape. Immigrant integration is the long term process where immigrants become incorporated into US life, and it involves both established residents and immigrant newcomers. It means immigrants learning English and American ways of life. It also means that American institutions are adapting to newcomers over the long run and combining diverse origins and perspectives into one people, the American people, as it has done for over 200 years. Ultimately, immigrant integration fosters social inclusiveness and economic mobility as immigrants and their offspring become full members of US communities. It refers to changes immigrants undergo as they adapt, but it also refers to the effect immigrants have on local institutions and communities as well as the nation.

In order for the U.S. immigration system to work well, it must address the social, political, and economic integration of immigrants who arrive with a multitude of national origins, languages, religions, customs, and skills. The current "system" of integration involves little formal aid or guidance from the federal government. Historically, immigrants turned to mutual aid societies, settlement houses, churches, and synagogues. Today, alongside state and local governments are schools, churches and a host of nonprofits, that develop programs and practices that aid in the integration of immigrants. The quality of these systems and institutions makes a difference in how people adapt to life in the United States; therefore it is imperative that local areas, especially ones newly affected by immigration trends, have guidance on policies to facilitate integration, and, as important, funding to carry them out.

There currently is no national office that works to coordinate, measure, and advance immigrant integration. Other countries such as Canada, Sweden, and the Netherlands include integration in their national offices.

States and localities – particularly in new immigrant destination areas – would benefit from intentional, strategic and coordinated public policy directed explicitly at immigrant integration.

Many of the state and local policy points that I have already mentioned are the very issues that constitute a framework for immigrant integration. Can we build a national, harmonized system of providing English language classes to immigrant newcomers? Can we ensure that newcomers, while on their way to learning English, have access to vital information about services, safety, and civic responsibilities? Can we develop programs to assist new destination areas with resources to help public schools, law enforcement agencies, and healthcare providers as they encounter immigrants and refugees for the first time?

What would such a program look like? Seed funding for the proposed "New Americans Initiative" would be provided by the federal government, but would comprise state initiatives built around public-private partnerships. A good model is a 2005 Illinois initiative designed to provide a "coherent, strategic, and proactive state government approach to immigrant integration." In Illinois, a State Taskforce, which includes high-level state agency and department officials, is charged with examining how the state government can systematically address its changing population, augmented by a Policy Council, which includes Illinois leaders with experience managing immigration in the business, community, philanthropic, faith, labor, and government fields. The two groups' recommendations prioritized programs that would help immigrants learn English, put legal immigrants on a path towards citizenship, establish state Welcoming Centers as a first point of contact for immigrants arriving into Illinois, and provide better access to services that state agencies provide.

Another model comes from the Colorado Community Trust's "Supporting Immigrant and Refugee Families Initiative" which supports 19 Colorado

communities in their efforts to support immigrants and established residents in working together for healthy communities. Specific needs and strategies are identified through a planning process that involves members from a wide range of perspectives: health care, education, business, banking, law enforcement, local government, and various nonprofit and faith-based organizations. Current projects include strengthening local health care providers' ability to offer competent care to people from different cultures, helping immigrant parents to become more involved in their children's schools, improving access to English classes for immigrants, and developing mentoring opportunities among foreign and native-born families.

Under a national New Americans Initiative, states would similarly be encouraged to design plans specific to their needs. Recommendations from the Illinois experience that are universally applicable include:

- *Implementing an English learning campaign.* Gaining English proficiency is fundamentally important for immigrants to participate fully in American society. This recommendation calls for a coordinated effort among the state community college board, businesses, educators, and immigrant advocates to create, fund, and implement a campaign to offer English instruction where immigrants live and work.

- *Helping eligible legal permanent residents attain U.S. citizenship.* When immigrants naturalize, they take on the rights and responsibilities of being a full member of U.S. society; they can vote, hold public office, serve on juries, and participate in other civic activities. The program should support community-based organizations that help immigrants prepare for the naturalization exam and guide them through the formal process.

- *Ensuring that immigrants and refugees can access state services.* While immigrants are building their English skills, they should have good access to services and information about state offerings, even if it must be provided in their own languages. Many local governments across the country already offer services and material in languages of local immigrant groups, provide translation services, and hire multi-lingual staff. Implementing this recommendation will make language access a foundational method of doing business with local governments.

For states to adopt a model such as the Illinois or Colorado examples would require federal start-up funds. Each state would design its own strategic recommendations and advisory structure, pursue funding from foundations and businesses to create public-private partnerships, and work with local organizations in affected areas. The federal government would monitor the New Americans Initiative to glean policy guidance and promising practices that can be

shared across states, where immigration patterns are new, changing, or well established. It should also work to first develop and then achieve certain measurable benchmarks related to immigrant integration.

Concluding Thoughts

Current legislative proposals point to the possibility of an earned legalization program. Such a program would enable localities to demonstrate the presence and size of their undocumented population. New destination states and localities, especially, have short-term fiscal burdens related to providing schooling, emergency health care, and other social services that they cannot meet through existing revenue sources. An earned legalization program must include funding for an impact aid program to offset state and local expenditures.

A precedent for this proposed program is the $4 billion State Legalization Impact Aid Grant program, a provision of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) that helped states offset the costs associated with legalized immigrants. The plan was to compensate states for providing public benefits, public health services, and adult education to help immigrants meet IRCA's requirements for basic knowledge of the English language, U.S. history, and government. Unfortunately, the program, which ended in 1995, was unevenly implemented. States and localities complained that reimbursements were too low and too slow and that reporting requirements were poorly designed. To succeed, a new impact aid program must function better than the last one by stating clear guidelines, allowing states planning flexibility, and requiring less onerous reporting requirements.

A large-scale legalization program would create millions of new legal residents whose status may result in more stable employment and higher income, which benefit them, while the concomitantly higher income tax payments benefit government entities. The additional services they need should be covered in part by fees for registering with the earned legalization program. Such fees should cover the program's administrative costs, defray social expenditures, and contribute to the New Americans Initiative to ensure longer term integration.

Regardless of when immigration reform happens, states and localities face on-the-ground realities regarding new flows of immigration. It is time for the federal government to take a leadership role in making the integration process smoother for immigrants, state and local governments, and communities. Ultimately, all integration is local.

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