



# Drexel Policy Notes

## To Improve Pennsylvania's Economy, Put Out the Welcome Mat for Immigrants

Ambassador Joseph M. Torsella (Ret.), Drexel University

## A Comprehensive Approach to "Immigrant-Friendly" State and Local Policies

Anil Kalhan, Drexel University

## The State of State Legislation

Peter Gonzales, Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians

## Comments on Torsella and Thoughts About Pennsylvania Senate Bill 159

Nicholas V. Montalto, Diversity Dynamics

## Concluding Thoughts

Anne O'Callaghan, Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians

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# To Improve Pennsylvania's Economy, Put Out the Welcome Mat for Immigrants

Ambassador Joseph M. Torsella (Ret.), Drexel University

Washington's been talking about immigration a lot these days, but another capital should be, too: Harrisburg.

New policy makers have taken office—from the Governor's chamber, to the General Assembly, to scores of state agencies and departments—with a mandate to revive Pennsylvania's sluggish economy. Our state has some impressive resources to meet this challenge, but there's one we could use a bit more of: immigrants.

While the number of new Americans in the United States today is higher than ever, as a percentage of our total population, we're still below the historic highs that marked the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

What's more, the picture varies considerably state by state, and that in Pennsylvania is not especially bright. We rank near the top (No. 6) of states by population, but punch below our weight in our proportion of foreign-born to native-born, where we rank No. 24 or No. 29, depending on whether estimates of undocumented immigrants are included. It's an irony for a state settled as a refuge, but when it comes to attracting immigrants, modern Pennsylvania is a laggard, not a leader.

That's a problem. Immigrants, both temporary and permanent, fuel prosperity—for everyone. They improve the demographic ratio of workers to retirees, in turn improving the fiscal picture of governments. Immigrants—both new Americans and foreign

visitors—add immense cash flows to the economy: in 2011 and 2012, Pennsylvania’s 33,000 foreign students alone spent \$1.1 billion. And best of all, immigrants often drive the innovation that drives growth. They are, for example, more than twice as likely as non-immigrants to start new businesses.

So it’s no wonder that over the past two decades, the large U.S. metro areas with the greatest increase in immigrant ratios also had the fastest economic growth.

That’s why, even as Congress has stalled on comprehensive reform, smart state and local leaders from both parties have been busy, not arguing about legal status, but trying to proactively attract more legal immigration, period. From New York to Chicago to California, savvy states and cities have been taking steps to make themselves magnets for immigration and claim a higher share of new arrivals. Although great efforts exist regionally in Philadelphia and in Pittsburgh, the state of Pennsylvania as a whole is not yet on this list.

It should be. And there’s plenty Harrisburg can do to attract more legal immigration into the Pennsylvania economy while we wait, fingers crossed, to see how the long-running Washington immigration saga finally ends.

First, the Governor should issue a Welcoming Proclamation to advertise that our state is open to immigrants and their innovations. Second, Pennsylvania should join the 17 other states that have

#### ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTOR:

*Retired Ambassador Joseph M. Torsella was a Distinguished Visiting Fellow in Public Policy at Drexel University during the 2014-2015 academic year. An earlier version of this essay appeared in the Philadelphia Inquirer.*

officially partnered with Welcoming America—a national nonprofit that works to promote mutual respect between those born in foreign countries and in the U.S. Third, even in a tough budget climate, Pennsylvania should consider opening a state Office of New Americans, as New York, Michigan, and Illinois already have. (A good bill to do just this, SB 159, has been introduced in the General Assembly, after a similar bill failed to advance in the previous session. There are advantages to legislative action, but executive action to create such an office is a good alternative.) Any new office should have horizontal responsibilities across state government, but should also work to mainstream immigrant integration as an ongoing responsibility in many departments. Finally, Pennsylvania should create and implement a New Americans Plan, similar to the ones successfully implemented in Ohio and Chicago to attract and integrate immigrants.

This list is the beginning, not the end, of a successful effort. Funding for the organizations that connect immigrants with employers is also key. Nevertheless, these four steps, when taken together, would amount to a recruitment plan and nudge our share of U.S. immigrants higher.

That's because improving that number is likely to improve another important number: the "wealth" in the commonwealth.

Comparing recent figures from 2012 for states' total immigrant population ratios with their gross domestic product shows why.

When the states are divided into quintiles, the top group—states with the highest proportion of all immigrants—had average economic output of \$55,600 per person. The bottom group—states with the lowest immigrant ratios—had an average per capita GDP of just \$44,000, a whopping 26 percent difference.

That pattern holds true down the line. Pennsylvania is in the third quintile, which had an average per capita GDP of \$48,130, well below the high-producing top 10.

True, booming economies naturally attract immigrants. But there is evidence suggesting causation, not just correlation: especially when there is “complementarity” between native and immigrant skill sets, immigration can cause—not just respond to—per capita GDP growth.

So moving the Commonwealth up on the list of immigrant-friendly states—especially if informed by smart analysis about the kinds of migrants and sectors we seek to welcome and support, and if built upon the kinds of immigrant social networks that already exist—can also help to move Pennsylvania up on the list of high-performing economies.

Because as immigrants pursue their American dreams in Pennsylvania, they help to make the rest of us richer, too.



# A Comprehensive Approach to “Immigrant-Friendly” State and Local Policies

Anil Kalhan, Drexel University

Joseph Torsella eloquently and persuasively draws attention to the substantial contributions that immigrants make to Pennsylvania’s economy and the important responsibilities that state governments must assume to more effectively attract, welcome, and integrate immigrants into the social fabric of the state’s communities. In urging Pennsylvania’s elected officials to take a series of concrete, proactive steps to promote greater inclusion and integration of immigrant community members, he correctly emphasizes that state governments are not and should not remain passive bystanders to the nation’s policy debates over immigration. As he also correctly notes, the steps he proposes are only “the beginning, not the end, of a successful effort” to help Pennsylvania become a more immigrant-friendly state.

Indeed, as states and localities across the country have increasingly recognized, the goal of welcoming and embracing immigrants as community members demands not only the kinds of immigrant integration measures that Torsella appropriately urges, but also a broad constellation of other interventions—ranging from stronger protections against mistreatment to more affirmative efforts to promote civic participation and access to programs, benefits, and services. For example, a growing number of states and localities—including a significant number of cities and counties in Pennsylvania—have limited their participation in federal immigration policing in order to promote trust and cooperation between immigrant communities and law enforcement agencies.

At least eighteen states enable immigrant residents to receive in-state tuition rates at public colleges and universities, and at least eleven states make driver's licenses available to immigrant residents. More recently, several cities have begun issuing identification cards for residents, including immigrant residents, that facilitate their ability to conduct a variety of basic, day-to-day activities, such as renting apartments and opening bank accounts. And in a handful of localities, immigrants even have been extended the right to vote in some local elections.

Collectively, these practices and others highlight a growing recognition by state and local governments that a commitment to welcoming and integrating immigrants should be understood as part of a broader commitment to facilitate the membership, inclusion, and participation of all state and local residents in the day-to-day lives of their communities, without regard to immigration or citizenship status. As such, these practices also reflect an understanding that efforts to welcome and integrate immigrants as community members will necessarily be hampered if they do not also pay careful attention to the particular challenges to promoting inclusion, dignity, and fairness for undocumented immigrants, who in Pennsylvania comprise approximately twenty percent of the state's non-U.S.-born residents. Like other immigrants, undocumented immigrants make significant and well-recognized economic, social, and civic contributions to state and local communities—but they also experience distinct vulnerabilities and forms of marginalization that



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place significant obstacles in the way of those contributions. Since undocumented immigrants live and work in the same communities as U.S. citizens and noncitizens with lawful immigration status—and very frequently are members of mixed-status families—those same barriers can also significantly hinder the inclusion and integration of other members of immigrant communities, and thereby inhibit their contributions as well.

For many years, immigration restrictionists have actively urged state and local governments to adopt aggressive, enforcement-oriented measures aimed at excluding immigrants from state and local communities and inducing what proponents of those measures call “self-deportation.” By contrast, those seeking to welcome and integrate immigrants, like Torsella, have only more recently begun to explore the various types of initiatives that states and localities can implement to attract and embrace immigrants as members of their communities. Especially as comprehensive immigration reform continues to languish in Washington, these efforts to find innovative, robust, and no less comprehensive means of becoming more “immigrant-friendly” at the state and local levels have only become more important—not only to enhance the well-being of state and local communities and improve the day-to-day lives of immigrants, but also to help move that stalled national debate in more productive directions.



# The State of State Legislation

Peter Gonzales, Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians

Attracting and retaining immigrants as an economic development strategy is on the rise across the United States. Over the past few years, the Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians has been asked to share our model with many organizations around the country who are exploring ways to grow their regional economies through immigrant integration. As founding members of IMPRINT, a coalition focused on immigrant professional integration, and the Welcoming Economies Global Network, which is now a project of Welcoming America, we have been actively promoting best practices and policies that would make cities, states and regions more welcoming. But what does it mean to be more welcoming?

In a report we published in 2014, *Choosing Philadelphia*, we documented the reasons immigrants moved to our region and why they decided to stay. It became clear from the data we collected that extended family and friends play a critical and purposeful role in helping newcomers find their first homes and access their first jobs while advising them on their longer term goals. It was also clear that people were coming to Philadelphia because they had a social network, and they stayed because they had an income. We believe that a successful welcoming initiative at the state level must be mindful of the bread-and-butter economic issues and strategically focus talent-attraction efforts accordingly.

After numerous trips to Harrisburg to educate legislators about the role immigrants were playing in the economic growth in pockets across the Commonwealth, we were successful in getting State

Senator James Ferlo from Pittsburgh to introduce a bill to create an Office of New Americans last summer. The bill was reintroduced by State Senator Rob Teplitz as SB 159 with five Democratic co-sponsors. The following is taken from Sen. Teplitz' sponsorship memo for SB 159:

The Office of New Americans will be instructed to help attract, retain, and integrate immigrants into Pennsylvania society. Immigrants provide an important source of energy, innovation, and entrepreneurial activity, and I believe that Pennsylvania can do more to be competitive in attracting and keeping this pool of talent.

Immigrants face many challenges when they move to a new country, in addition to attaining citizenship. These can be as simple as earning a driver's license, or as complicated as receiving certification or licensure from the appropriate state oversight board for their profession. Learning or perfecting English, finding health care solutions, and moving into new homes, neighborhoods, and school districts all provide challenges that can be resolved with a little coordination from state government and local immigrant assistance organizations, such as the Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians and Vibrant Pittsburgh.

The legislation will instruct the Office to provide internal coordination of services that commonly affect the lives of

immigrants, to promote the state abroad to attract skilled workers, and once here, to help integrate immigrants into their local communities. The duties will include:

1. Responding to inquiries from state agencies, the media, immigrant-serving organizations, and the public about immigration issues in Pennsylvania.
2. Serve as point of contact for state licensing boards and the Bureau of Professional and Occupational Affairs.
3. Serve as a clearinghouse of information for state agencies on immigration-related policy issues, and coordinate among agencies as appropriate.
4. Develop strategies to attract, retain, and incorporate immigrants into Pennsylvania.
5. Convene stakeholders in business development and international trade promotion programs to increase their capacity to draw on immigrant contributors.
6. Convene municipal officials to boost peer learning on immigration possibilities among third-class cities struggling with population loss and economic decline.
7. Convene colleges and universities to foster learning about strategies for immigrant and international student retention.

#### ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTOR:

*Peter Gonzales is the Welcoming Center's president and CEO. An immigration attorney by training, Peter was a founding partner of the Gonzales Tiagha law firm. He is an active member of the American Immigration Lawyers Association and a past Pennsylvania State Chair of the International Municipal Lawyers Association. In 2008 he was appointed by Philadelphia Mayor Michael A. Nutter to serve on the Zoning Board of Adjustment, where he served until 2012. Previously, Peter also worked for the Solicitor's Office for the City of Philadelphia, the nonprofit Project HOME, and the U.S. Agency for International Development.*

The legislation will also create the Advisory Board to the Office of New Americans that will advise the Governor and the office on how to best attract, retain, and integrate immigrants. The office will be composed of key department secretaries, or their designees, and individuals from several non-governmental sectors with expertise on immigration policy. The Board will be composed of 20 members appointed by the Governor.

While it is not a perfect bill and does not replace the important work we must do every day to prepare people for living, working, and succeeding in America, we would like to see the bill advance or, in the alternative, see such an office established at the executive level.



# Comments on Torsella and Thoughts about Pennsylvania Senate Bill 159

Nicholas V. Montalto, Diversity Dynamics

Retired Ambassador Joseph Torsella's article raises a number of questions that might be worth considering as his ideas gain further traction and move from concept to reality.

As Peter Gonzales notes, much good work has gone into crafting a bill in the Pennsylvania Senate, SB 159, to create an Office of New Americans. The bill has many positive aspects, including its broad mandate, its emphasis on the economic benefits of immigration, its attention to licensing issues for skilled immigrants, its clearinghouse and convening functions, and its ability to secure input through a 20-member Advisory Committee broadly representative of major departments of Commonwealth government and external constituencies. However, there are a number of issues that appear to remain unresolved:

- Why is the proposed legislation silent on the challenge of delivering services in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner? Although its roots are in the civil rights era, the cultural competency movement has increasingly over time addressed the needs of immigrants as well as African Americans. The development of language access standards, for example—such as those reflected in the National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services of the Office of Minority Health—is an important reference point for those interested in immigrant integration. Should the proposed office, therefore, have any role in ensuring that all communities have equitable access to state-provided or state-funded services and supports?

- How would the new Office of New Americans interface with other entities within the Commonwealth responsible for diversity-related initiatives impacting (or potentially impacting) the immigrant and refugee population, such as the Multicultural Advisory Committee of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Cultural Competence Advisory Committee of the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, Cultural Diversity Advisory Committee within the Department of Aging, Office of Health Equity within the Department of Health, and the Pennsylvania Refugee Resettlement Program? Entities such as these, some more or less active, are scattered throughout state government. Should they play an enhanced role in a cross-departmental effort to better serve immigrant and other minority populations?

- Where is the best place to locate such an office within state government? If the new office is to exercise “horizontal” responsibilities, should it not be housed within the Pennsylvania Office of Administration or the Governor’s office, with direct links to the Governor? To the extent that it is isolated within a particular department, its coordinating function may be difficult to perform.

- What can be done to mainstream immigrant integration as an ongoing responsibility of state government? There is an interesting literature on the advisability of “stand-alone” immigration services, especially during periods of budgetary shortfalls. Some have expressed a concern that such services tend

to be politically vulnerable. Others worry that the “immigration” frame may exclude other groups equally deserving of attention, such as the second generation (children of immigrants), African Americans, and native-born minorities. If there is validity to such concerns, it might be appropriate to revive and strengthen the Office of Diversity Management, which existed during the Ed Rendell administration, not perhaps in place of the Office of New Americans, but in addition to it, especially if key diversity-related functions are outside the latter’s purview. If diversity is the new normal, then perhaps immigrant services must be seen as one expression of a comprehensive approach to diversity.

As Pennsylvania seeks to reap the advantages of immigration for its economy and society, it should be mindful of ongoing federal efforts to promote immigrant integration. In November 2014, President Barack Obama created a formal interagency body, called the White House Task Force on New Americans, to develop a plan of action to integrate immigrants into the civic, social, and economic life of the nation. Personnel from 18 federal departments and agencies served on the task force. The Task Force sought public input to guide its deliberations, including a National Call for Ideas, which generated approximately 350 submissions, online stakeholder listening sessions, and site visits to local communities. Published in April 2015 and titled *Strengthening Communities by Welcoming All Residents: A Federal Strategic Action Plan on Immigrant & Refugee Integration*, the plan contains 48 recommendations in four broad areas: building welcoming communities, strengthening pathways



#### ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTOR:

*Nicholas V. Montalto is president of Diversity Dynamics. He holds a doctorate in American immigrant and ethnic history from the University of Minnesota and served for 25 years as President and CEO of the International Institute of New Jersey. He has served as special advisor to the Program on Immigration and Democracy at Rutgers University, as chair of the Board of Directors of the New Jersey Immigration Policy Network, and as a member of the Hispanic Advisory Committee of the New Jersey Department of Human Services.*

to naturalization and promoting civic engagement, supporting skill development and entrepreneurship and protecting New American workers, and expanding opportunities for linguistic integration and education. Within each of these four areas, the report reviews existing federal, state, and local efforts, and then outlines recommended actions to be taken by relevant federal agencies. In December 2015, the task force is scheduled to submit a status report to the President on progress made in implementing these recommendations.

The Task Force's recommendations may suggest some opportunities for collaboration among federal, state, and local government on issues of immigrant integration. As the Task Force is an interdepartmental entity, it is likely that many departments of the federal government will be looking for opportunities to partner with states on policies and programs to promote immigrant integration. One of the three "pillars" of immigrant integration in the federal framework—in addition to civic and linguistic—is economic integration, so Obama's approach is consistent with Torsella's. However, it will be important to view immigrant integration as a crosscutting issue affecting many agencies and departments of state government. This may have some implications for the proposal to create an Office of New Americans within the Commonwealth, as the unfolding federal vision for immigrant integration presumes an "all-of-government" approach.



# Concluding Thoughts

Anne O'Callaghan, Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians

**Immigrants start businesses.** Those businesses are not limited to mom-and-pop retail stores: More than 25 percent of the tech companies founded in a recent 10-year period had an immigrant founder. These companies represented 450,000 jobs and \$52 billion in sales in one year alone.

**Immigrant entrepreneurs create jobs in communities that need jobs.** Small businesses that employ up to 4 people are the most likely to be created by new immigrants, and account for the largest percentage increase in employment among business of all sizes.

**Increases in immigration have been linked to increases in property value.** Immigrants often move into low-income neighborhoods where they can find affordable housing for their families. Immigrant business-owners also set up shop in affordable areas, often filling vacant storefronts and improving the visual landscape.

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*Anne O'Callaghan is the president emeritus of the Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians. She founded the Welcoming Center in 2003 and served as its president and CEO for nine years before moving to the emeritus role in April 2012. She has been a prominent advocate for immigrants over three decades.*

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