

MISSION January 18, 2010

OneAmerica
advances the
fundamental
principles of
democracy and
justice at the
local, state and
national levels
by building
power within
immigrant
communities
in collaboration
with key allies.

Testimony on Behalf of OneAmerica

Senate Ways & Means Committee Public Hearing on Governor's 2010 Supplemental Budget

My name is Toby Guevin, and I am the State Policy and Legislative Manager for OneAmerica. On behalf of OneAmerica and its members, we submit the following testimony on the Governor's 2010 supplemental budget. A member-based organization and the largest immigrant rights organization in the state, OneAmerica's mission is to advance the fundamental principles of democracy and justice through building power in immigrant communities, in collaboration with key allies. Over the past few years, the organization has registered more than 23,000 voters with whom we maintain frequent communication on issues of importance to the immigrant community and its wellbeing.

As Americans and immigrants, we believe in the American Dream—that through hard work we can build a life of opportunities for our families—and we also recognize the importance of a good investment. Citizenship and learning English are both an important part of the American Dream for immigrants and a critical investment in the future economic success of Washington State's new Americans. In these difficult economic times, we are asking the legislature to continue its investment in the economic future of working immigrant families by investing in the Washington New Americans Program and language access and acquisition. Using a balanced approach to our budget deficit that includes new and progressive revenue that does not disproportionately impact communities of color and immigrants, we can help ensure that Washington State remains committed to the values, investments, and dreams we all hold dear.

The Governor's all-cuts Book 1 budget was admittedly an "unjust" budget and we as an organization could not agree more. Accordingly, we ask the legislature to pursue progressive forms of revenue in an effort to continue its investment in the economic future and fundamental values of Washington State and its residents. We urge the legislature to ensure these new revenue sources do not disproportionately burden communities of color, including immigrants.

We also ask the Legislature to reinstate funding for two very important programs:

First, maintain current funding levels for the Washington New American Program in the Department of Commerce, approximately \$532,000 for the biennium; and

Second, support language access and acquisition programs, including the restoration of medical interpreter services at nearly \$17 million

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1) Maintain current funding levels for the Washington New Americans Program (WNA) in the Department of Commerce

In her Book 1 budget, Governor Gregoire eliminated funding for WNA. While we fully recognize the budget challenges caused by the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression, we believe WNA represents a sound investment in the economic future of Washington State and its new Americans, since citizenship is tied to higher earnings, more job opportunities, social mobility, asset building, and better overall economic outcomes. Washington has approximately 160,000 legal permanent residents eligible for citizenship, who have not yet naturalized because of numerous barriers, such as prohibitive costs, access to legal and other services, lack of information, and fear of the process. By funding WNA, the state is investing in pathways to economic success for working immigrant families, all of our communities, and key industries in the state. In addition:

WNA is a statewide program that leverages the best elements of public-private partnership and brings additional dollars to the state. WNA leverages key relationships with nonprofit agencies, the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA), Gates Foundation, and the Federal Government to match 62% of the state’s dollars.

WNA has broad impact, doing more with less. Despite having minimal funds (\$532,000 for the biennium after rounds of both budget and administrative cuts), WNA served 1,760 people through its citizenship outreach program; received 241,000 hits on its website; utilized 372 volunteers to administer citizenship legal services; provided at least 30,000 people with materials about citizenship; and reached 3.75 million people with its ethnic media campaign using television, radio, and the interior of buses to get out the message about citizenship.

WNA helps working families become citizens who would otherwise not have access to the process, while at the same time building and supporting the infrastructure of service providers. WNA helped more than 700 legal permanent residents complete their citizenship forms and awarded 12 grants to ten agencies across the State, including in Central and Eastern WA, for Outreach, Education and Naturalization Services and provided training to all subcontractors.

WNA meets people where they are: In-district. WNA, in partnership with AILA, hosted Citizenship Days—three days at 11 sites across WA— where immigrants can complete applications with pro bono lawyers. Citizenship days are focused on areas with limited access to legal assistance and have taken place in Vancouver, Aberdeen, Lacey, Centralia, Port Angeles, Bellingham, Mt. Vernon, Tukwila, Tacoma, Wenatchee, Yakima and Pasco.

*WNA is an effective and efficient program; it works. According to a November 2009 Department of Commerce Report on Performance and Outcomes, “A review of performance measures set for the first phase of the New Americans Program indicates that [the partnership] **exceeded** contract goals for the first year of the program.” In addition, “The demand for the services that the New Americans Program experienced in its first year exceeded the capacity of the program.”*

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WNA is already nationally recognized. WNA was one of 13 naturalization programs in the country chosen out of 300 applications for a \$100,000 grant from US Citizenship and Immigration Services.

WNA provides culturally and linguistically appropriate services. WNA disseminated information about the citizenship process through a hotline in 20 languages, a website in six languages, and translated materials.

*WNA is a gateway to opportunity and introduces new pathways to success. WNA provided referrals to English classes and other naturalization services and created a Naturalization Curriculum that is effective but not intimidating and emphasizes civic involvement *beyond* citizenship.*

WNA is ambitious and evolves to meet the needs of new Americans. This year, WNA expands to a 12th Citizenship Day site and partners with local credit unions to provide naturalization loans.

2) Support language access and acquisition programs, including the restoration of medical interpreter services at nearly \$17 million

Governor Gregoire’s Book 1 supplemental budget eliminates nearly \$17 million of funding for medical interpretation services. We urge the legislature to restore this funding in its budget and ensure that all Washingtonians have access to culturally and linguistically appropriate medical services.

In Washington State, approximately 400,000 limited English proficient (LEP) immigrants require medical interpretation to communicate in medical settings and 150,000 patients currently depend on the interpreter services program for quality health care. These essential services ensure that LEP patients can communicate with their medical providers and understand medical instructions, follow up care, and proper prescription drug use, among others, while also guaranteeing that doctor’s have the ability and resources to make accurate diagnoses. Lack of information will only lead to delayed or insufficient medical attention, resulting in more acute conditions and higher costs in emergency room care.

All three of these priorities are important investments in the economic wellbeing of Washington State and coincide with its firmly held values. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today and for your consideration on these important issues.

Respectfully submitted,

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