



## SB 452 (Gonzalez) – The Office of Immigration and Refugee Affairs

### SUMMARY

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In order to better address the needs of California’s immigrant and refugee population, SB 452 establishes a permanent structure, the California Immigrant and Refugee Affairs Agency, within the state to serve and assist other state agencies and local offices by evaluating their programs for accessibility and effectiveness in providing services to this population.

### EXISTING LAW

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In 2015, Governor Jerry Brown established the Statewide Director of Immigrant Integration as a permanent position tasked with assessing and addressing the challenges faced by immigrants and refugees in California. In addition, multiple state agencies are tasked with carrying out programs or services specifically tailored to immigrant communities including educational opportunities, immigrant legal services, job training, and placement assistance. Despite these resources, California lacks a centralized entity with a holistic strategy and that is dedicated to address the unique needs of immigrant and refugee communities.

Currently three states have created statewide offices to serve and help integrate immigrants and refugees. These include the Massachusetts Office for Refugees and Immigrants (created in 1992), the New York State Office for New Americans (2014), and the Nevada Office for New Americans (2019).

### BACKGROUND/PROBLEM

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California is home to approximately 11 million immigrants and refugees, comprising nearly one quarter of the

state’s population and 34% of the labor force.<sup>1</sup> This diverse population has been pivotal in shaping the Golden State to be what it is today, a thriving economy that rivals many nations and that is enriched by innovators and entrepreneurs who are immigrants.

California openly welcomes immigrants and refugees by providing needed support for immigrants to successfully integrate and establish themselves into our state. Many California cities such as Los Angeles and Santa Clara have already created a local office of immigrants in order to advance the well-being of all immigrants. These local offices provide and connect our immigrant communities to services that foster their full participation in civic life and build stronger opportunities; however, there is a lack of coordination at the state level.

The Trump Administration implemented an anti-immigrant agenda that drastically impacted immigration courts and agencies that oversee the adjudication of immigrants seeking relief. These policy changes include tying the hands of immigration judges, implementing a new public charge rule, proposed fee increases, hindering the asylum process, increasing the amount of cases added to application backlogs, and substantially defunding resettlement agencies, among many other directives and policies.

The Biden Administration, however, has outlined steps to reform the country’s immigration system including supporting legislation introduced in the US Congress that would create a pathway to citizenship for nearly 11 million undocumented immigrants in the country.

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<sup>1</sup> American Immigration Council. 2017. “Immigrants in California.” <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/immigrants-in-california>.

With the COVID-19 pandemic having a disproportionate impact on immigrants, and as federal immigration policies continue to change, it is important now more than ever that California has a centralized agency to address the unique needs of these communities.

## **SOLUTION**

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In order to wholly welcome immigrants to California and achieve full integration, the state must be bold and proactive in its approach to offering direct services while addressing rapid policy changes impacting immigrants and refugees. SB 452 would do this by establishing the Office of Immigration and Refugee Affairs, under a new Agency.

Responsibilities of the Office would include coordinating with local Immigrant Affairs Offices to streamlining services and providing grants to support capacity building and training among state agencies and local communities on how to effectively assist immigrants and refugees.

## **SUPPORT**

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Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (Sponsor)

## **CONTACT**

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