

Office of New Americans Advisory Board Meeting  
Minutes  
Wednesday, October 9, 2024  
12:00 pm-4:30 PM

**DRAFT FOR REVIEW**

**Office of New Americans Advisory Board (ONAAB) members present (9):**

*Andrei Lipan, Krishendeo Ramsingh, Cuong Nguyen, Michael Hoefer, Milton Vickerman, Zarmina Yusufi, Christopher Mitchell, Sasha Taylor, Elizabeth Njuguna*

**ONAAB members absent (6):** *Karina Lipsman, Juan Santacoloma, Panyiotis “Yoti” Jabri, James Gordon, Karina Martich, Eric-Michel Sossou-Gloh*

**ONAAB Ex-officio members present:** None

**Office of New Americans (ONA) and Governor’s Office Staff present:**

*Lilliana Penalver, Office of New Americans*

**Additional Guests:**

*Morgan Berry, Assistant Attorney General Office*

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**Welcome and Call to Order**

Andrei Lipan called the meeting to order officially at 12:05.

**Virtual participation**

Board members voted unanimously to allow Sasha Taylor to participate remotely.

Member	Yes	No	Abstain
Andrei Lipan	<b>x</b>		
Christopher Mitchell	<b>x</b>		
Cuong Nguyen	<b>x</b>		
Elizabeth Njuguna	<b>x</b>		
Eric-Michel Sossou-Gloh	<b>Absent</b>		
James Gordon	<b>Absent</b>		
Juan Santacoloma	<b>Absent</b>		
Karina Lipsman	<b>Absent</b>		
Karina Martich	<b>Absent</b>		

<b>Member</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Abstain</b>
Krishendeo Ramsingh	<b>x</b>		
Mike Hoefer	<b>x</b>		
Milton Vickerman	<b>x</b>		
Panyiotis “Yoti” Jabri	<b>Absent</b>		
Sasha Taylor			<b>x</b>
Zarmina Yusufi	<b>x</b>		

### **Previous Meeting Minutes Approval**

Approved the July 2024 minutes as drafted with no changes.

Andrei asked for a vote and Kris Ramsingh seconded. Approval was unanimous with one abstention

<b>Member</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Abstain</b>
Andrei Lipan	<b>x</b>		
Christopher Mitchell			<b>x</b>
Coung Nguyen	<b>x</b>		
Elizabeth Njuguna	<b>x</b>		
Eric-Michel Sossou-Gloh	<b>Absent</b>		
James Gordon	<b>Absent</b>		
Juan Santacoloma	<b>Absent</b>		
Karina Lipsman	<b>Absent</b>		
Karina Martich	<b>Absent</b>		
Krishendeo Ramsingh	<b>x</b>		
Mike Hoefer	<b>x</b>		
Milton Vickerman	<b>x</b>		
Panyiotis “Yoti” Jabri	<b>Absent</b>		
Sasha Taylor	<b>x</b>		
Zarmina Yusufi	<b>x</b>		

## 2024 Report Approval

Andrei recommended the approval of the 2024 report subject to possible amendments discussed during the meeting later in the afternoon. Kris Ramsingh seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

Member	Yes	No	Abstain
Andrei Lipan	<b>x</b>		
Christopher Mitchell	<b>x</b>		
Coung Nguyen	<b>x</b>		
Elizabeth Njuguna	<b>x</b>		
Eric-Michel Sossou-Gloh	<b>Absent</b>		
James Gordon	<b>Absent</b>		
Juan Santacoloma	<b>Absent</b>		
Karina Lipsman	<b>Absent</b>		
Karina Martich	<b>Absent</b>		
Krishendeo Ramsingh	<b>x</b>		
Mike Hoefer	<b>x</b>		
Milton Vickerman	<b>x</b>		
Panyiotis “Yoti” Jabri	<b>Absent</b>		
Sasha Taylor	<b>x</b>		
Zarmina Yusufi	<b>x</b>		

## 2025 Executive Committee Elections

Andrei opened the discussion of the 2025 elections stating that he would like to continue as the Chair in 2025. He will continue to work to be a bridge between the administration and the Office of New Americans and to focus on economic opportunity. No others submitted their name for the position. Andrei put forth the motion that he be elected as Chair of the Executive Committee, Kris Ramsingh seconded, and the vote was unanimous in favor.

Member	Yes	No	Abstain
Andrei Lipan	<b>x</b>		

<b>Member</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Abstain</b>
Christopher Mitchell	<b>x</b>		
Coung Nguyen	<b>x</b>		
Elizabeth Njuguna	<b>x</b>		
Eric-Michel Sossou-Gloh	<b>Absent</b>		
James Gordon	<b>Absent</b>		
Juan Santacoloma	<b>Absent</b>		
Karina Lipsman	<b>Absent</b>		
Karina Martich	<b>Absent</b>		
Krishendeo Ramsingh	<b>x</b>		
Mike Hoefer	<b>x</b>		
Milton Vickerman	<b>x</b>		
Panyiotis “Yoti” Jabri	<b>Absent</b>		
Sasha Taylor	<b>x</b>		
Zarmina Yusufi	<b>x</b>		

Michael Hoefer agreed to continue as Vice-chair, though he noted that his term was scheduled to end in June 2025. Mike said he would continue to support Andrei and work to provide continuity in the Board’s work since he was an original appointee in 2020. No others submitted their name for the position. Andrei put forth the motion that Mike be elected as Vice-chair of the Executive Committee, Chris Mitchell seconded, and the vote was unanimous in favor.

<b>Member</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Abstain</b>
Andrei Lipan	<b>x</b>		
Christopher Mitchell	<b>x</b>		
Coung Nguyen	<b>x</b>		
Elizabeth Njuguna	<b>x</b>		
Eric-Michel Sossou-Gloh	<b>Absent</b>		
James Gordon	<b>Absent</b>		
Juan Santacoloma	<b>Absent</b>		

<b>Member</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Abstain</b>
Karina Lipsman	<b>Absent</b>		
Karina Martich	<b>Absent</b>		
Krishendeo Ramsingh	<b>x</b>		
Mike Hoefer	<b>x</b>		
Milton Vickerman	<b>x</b>		
Panyiotis “Yoti” Jabri	<b>Absent</b>		
Sasha Taylor	<b>x</b>		
Zarmina Yusufi	<b>x</b>		

Andrei discussed that that he and Mike Hoefer felt it would be better to have the executive board back to 4 members in 2025 so that we continue to develop new leaders for the future. He noted that the Board would have more capability to develop agendas and invite guest speakers with a full board. He noted that we especially need a secretary to record meeting minutes and focus on Board communications. Chris Mitchell considered nominating himself for treasurer, but he retracted his nomination given the difficulty of traveling to in-person executive meetings from his hometown in SW Virginia. Hearing no other nominations Andrei closed the discussion, but we will continue to encourage board members to fill the vacancies.

### **2025 Meeting Schedule**

Andrei submitted a meeting schedule for 2025 that consisted of 3 in-person meetings and 1 virtual meeting unlike this year’s schedule which had an even split between in-person and virtual meetings. Zarmina Yusufi and Chris Mitchell offered alternative dates for 2 meetings that met with approval from all members. Zarmina also commented that it might be difficult to meet in person in January due to possible adverse weather. Based on the discussion, Andrei put forth the motion that we meet at the following times and formats:

- 1) January 7, 2025, Virtual
- 2) April 10, 2025, In person
- 3) July 16, 2025, Virtual
- 4) October 1, 2025 (or October 8<sup>th</sup> as a backup), In person,

Chris Mitchell seconded the motion and the schedule was approved.

<b>Member</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Abstain</b>
Andrei Lipan	<b>x</b>		
Christopher Mitchell	<b>x</b>		
Coung Nguyen	<b>x</b>		

<b>Member</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Abstain</b>
Elizabeth Njuguna	<b>x</b>		
Eric-Michel Sossou-Gloh	<b>Absent</b>		
James Gordon	<b>Absent</b>		
Juan Santacoloma	<b>Absent</b>		
Karina Lipsman	<b>Absent</b>		
Karina Martich	<b>Absent</b>		
Krishendeo Ramsingh	<b>x</b>		
Mike Hoefer		<b>x</b>	
Milton Vickerman	<b>x</b>		
Panyiotis “Yoti” Jabri	<b>Absent</b>		
Sasha Taylor	<b>x</b>		
Zarmina Yusufi	<b>x</b>		

### **New Member Introductions**

Sasha Taylor stated that she had recently retired from the FBI after 11 years of service and that she now works as a consultant focusing on child marriage and anti-trafficking. She is currently working with Senator Durbin on increasing the minimum age for marriage as well as immigrant visa sponsorship.

Chris Mitchell stated that he is the President of the Mountain Mission School in Gundy VA. The school has had many international students in recent years.

Elizabeth Njuguna stated that she immigrated to the United States about 18 years ago. She worked for the Small Business Administration, and she was an immigration lawyer. She currently works as a corporate lawyer.

### **Public Comment**

There were no public participants.

### **2024 Report Review and Discussion**

Andrei walked the board members through the 2024 report. He noted a major addition to the Access to Services section on honor killings that was submitted by Sasha Taylor. Sasha provided more information on the work she is doing, including her work with the governor’s office to ask that VA enact laws against honor killings.

Zarmina Yusufi added that given the current anti-immigrant rhetoric, and the Board's mandate to highlight the contributions of new immigrants, she felt we should add a recommendation that the governor make a statement stating that Virginia supports and welcomes immigrants. There was a discussion of what exactly we should recommend and where it should be in the report. Chris Mitchell suggested that it be placed in the report's conclusion. Andrei suggested that he and Zarmina work out some language for the board to consider for possible inclusion in the report.

Andrei continued to lead a review of the report and noted that the report still must be formatted for page numbers and footnotes, especially if there are any additions. He outlined that it is best for us to submit the report sooner than later so that it can be addressed by the General Assembly.

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### **Office of New Americans Update**

Lilliana Penalver reported on her ONA work promoting community awareness and fostering connections. Lilliana travels throughout VA and noted that she needs more help in order to meet the needs of the community. She is focusing on providing information on Human Trafficking using material from DHS' Blue campaign. She has provided educational training in Spanish on forced labor and human trafficking in more than 50 events throughout the Commonwealth. She also has provided information on fraud schemes (e.g., notaries) based on material developed by the Federal Trade Commission. She noted that the material is available in 25 languages and is in comic book form, which is helpful in communicating easily. ONA is also concentrating on refugee health and sponsoring an upcoming event. She stated that she also developed an ONA newsletter, which you can sign up for on the ONA website. She encourages us to sign up for it and distribute it to our contacts.

### **Chair and Vice-Chairs Report**

Andrei reiterated that he felt it would be helpful for board development to have a secretary and treasurer next year. Mike Hoefer provided some comments on how to be good board members and tips for increasing effectiveness. He noted that even new members should consider leadership roles. We get 4 new members every year and we welcome their unique backgrounds and passion for the mission of the board. He noted that members need to do more than attend our meetings. They should be proactive in participate in community events to understand the needs of new Americans. Mike provided a handout and reviewed the Board mandates noting that we always remember that our sole role is as advisors to the Governor and General Assembly. On a practical note, he encouraged new and veteran members to use the Google Docs site to share information and learn about general procedures and past work.

**Church World Service (CWS) Presentation**

Former ONAAB member Susanah Lepley gave a presentation on the work of the Harrisonburg Office of Church World Services to sponsor refugees. The presentation began with a general discussion of refugee and asylee definitions and statistics. She also discussed the methods CWS uses to work with refugees as they adjust to the U.S. during their first 3 months, and the work that they do for another 5 years to support the refugees they sponsored. Susannah promised to share the presentation with us. It will be shared with all board members once we receive it.

**Announcements**

Andrei announced that we need bios and portraits for each member to update the out-of-date ONAAB website. After taking a group picture for the website, Andrei closed the meeting at 4:35