

Hon. Charles Sousa
Minister of Citizenship and Immigration
Minister's Office
6th Floor – 400 University Avenue
Toronto, ON M7A 2R9

October 24, 2011

Dear Minister Sousa,

On behalf of the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI), we congratulate you on your appointment as Minister of Citizenship and Immigration and look forward to working with you in your new role.

OCASI is the umbrella organization for immigrant and refugee serving agencies in Ontario, and represents more than 200 community based organizations providing immigrant settlement and integration services across Ontario.

The Ontario government has long-recognized that immigration can strengthen Ontario's economy. Immigrant settlement and integration, particularly the labour market integration of immigrants, has been a priority for the Ontario government for many years. This commitment was reflected through the creation and ongoing support of the work of the Ontario Fairness Commissioner and investment in bridging and mentoring programs for internationally-trained immigrants, initiatives that allow immigrants to become fully engaged in Ontario's economy and make the fullest contribution possible. Premier McGuinty promised during the recent provincial election to introduce a training credit for employers who hire a recently arrived new Canadian. These initiatives will become important as Ontario prepares to tackle the economic challenges that face this province.

The Ontario government has also recognized the value of investing in settlement and integration services for immigrants and refugees. Over the last year, the government stepped in with funds to mitigate the pressure on service and organizational infrastructure that was created for agencies that did not receive an immigrant service contribution agreement with the federal government. The Ontario government's investment in immigrant services, specifically through the Newcomer Settlement Program, is critically important to allow agencies to address service gaps in the federally funded immigrant settlement programs. These funds allow agencies to develop and deliver innovative programs and services and to serve residents that would not qualify for federally-funded services, including many from equity-seeking groups. OCASI looks forward to continuing with you our ongoing discussion on the need to increase NSP investment, and open up funding opportunities for agencies that do not currently receive provincial settlement funding.

The provincial government has also been in discussion with the federal government to negotiate a greater say in the selection of immigrants to Ontario, and a greater say in the design and delivery of settlement programs and services, specifically through the vehicle of the Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement (COIA), which was signed in 2005 and expired in March 2010. OCASI has

urged the federal government to invest at least \$320 million annually in a future agreement, being the designated investment in the last year of COIA. However, Ontario did not receive the full amount promised in the last agreement. We also face a further reduction in anticipated federal settlement funding for Ontario, as a result of cuts to the national budget and a downward re-adjustment of the Ontario allocation based on a per-immigrant arrival funding formula. The federal Minister of Citizenship and Immigration has noted that immigrant arrival numbers to Ontario have declined over the last five years and that settlement funding should be adjusted accordingly. These developments as well as the priorities for a future federal-provincial immigration agreement are key OCASI concerns, on which we look forward to entering into a dialogue with you.

OCASI is pleased that under your leadership in your previous portfolio as Minister of Labour, the Ontario government pursued a number of measures related to better protection for workers. These initiatives are starting to make a difference for immigrant workers, who as a group are over-represented in precarious work and are more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation in Ontario's labour market. Your awareness of the challenges faced by immigrant workers will be an asset in your new portfolio as Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

Last year, the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration invested in an OCASI-led research initiative called "Making Ontario Home", consisting of an extensive survey to document the use of immigrant settlement services in Ontario. For the first time we will be able to gain a better understanding of patterns and trends of service use by immigrants and refugees in the province, which can also strengthen our understanding of immigrant and refugee needs. The research project is nearing completion and promises rich evidentiary data on the settlement and integration experience of immigrants, refugees and non-status migrants in Ontario. We look forward to working with you on understanding and addressing the issues and concerns that may arise from the findings, and to use this material to aid in long-term planning for immigrant settlement and integration in Ontario.

OCASI looks forward to discussing with you the opportunities to engage with Ontario's immigrant and refugee-serving sector to facilitate the effective settlement and integration of immigrants and refugees. We also look forward to the opportunity to discuss equity-related issues that impact on immigrants such as the three-month wait for OHIP, and the growing levels of immigrant poverty, particularly among racialized immigrants.

OCASI congratulates you once again on your new appointment and looks forward to working with you and your colleagues.

Sincerely,



Josie Di Zio
President



Debbie Douglas
Executive Director