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Grace Meng

Congress of the United States

Sixth District, New York

**Congresswoman Grace Meng (NY-06)
Testimony to the House Judiciary Committee Member's Day Hearing
October 22, 2021**

Chairman Nadler, Ranking Member Jordan, and distinguished members of the House Judiciary Committee, thank you for this opportunity to discuss several of my priorities, especially those around immigration policy, that are under your committee's jurisdiction. I am grateful for the dedication and commitment the Committee has shown in fighting to ensure our immigration system is welcoming and open to all who wish to come to our nation.

America thrives when our immigration system is thriving. Our nation is strengthened when we assist the efforts of new Americans to integrate, contribute to our economy, and be civically engaged. That is why I urge this committee to consider my New Deal for New Americans Act of 2021, H.R. 1308.

This sweeping legislation, that I introduced with my friends, Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal and Congressman Jesús G. "Chuy" García, will create a more inclusive and welcoming system to help new Americans achieve their American Dream. This bill would establish an initiative to coordinate the federal response to issues that affect the lives of new immigrants and refugees, as well as create grant and integration programs to help new Americans overcome common challenges such as English language proficiency and employment placement.

America aspires to be a beacon of hope and opportunity for those who wish to become new Americans. We must match word with deed. That is why I introduced the National Office of New Americans Act, H.R. 572. This bill would create a new entity in the Executive Office of the President that would be dedicated to coordinating federal, state, and local efforts to help immigrants and refugees integrate and transition to new Americans.

The prior administration consistently attacked our citizenship process through their attempts to end the fee waiver program to make it more difficult for eligible immigrants to apply to become naturalized citizens.

Cost should not be a barrier to immigrants in their pursuit of the American Dream, and attempts to end this successful program are counter to the nation's principles. That is why my friend, Congresswoman Norma Torres and I have introduced the Reduce Financial Barriers to Immigration and Citizenship Act of 2021, H.R. 5319.

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This bill would expand access to fee waivers for the over nine million immigrants who are eligible for citizenship. Additionally, our bill would codify the program so no future administration can infringe on legal pathways to citizenship. Expanding access to naturalization fee waivers has a successful track record of increasing citizenship and subsequent economic benefits among immigrants, especially those with lower incomes and lower levels of educational attainment.

Mr. Chairman, the rich tapestry of our nation that is comprised of diverse cultures, languages, and lived experiences has always been America's strength. Simply put, we must ensure our immigration system continues to promote and build our diversity. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to working with you and the Committee on passing these important legislative priorities and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.