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October 31, 2023

HPL's The American Place Receives \$450,000 to Support Citizenship Instruction

(Hartford, CT) Hartford Public Library's The American Place (TAP) was awarded \$450,000 by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to expand its successful citizenship instruction and naturalization application services to immigrants. Hartford Public Library (HPL) was the only public library in the country to be awarded funds through USCIS' Citizenship Instruction and Naturalization Application Services grants program.

"We are so appreciative of this recognition. Public libraries have a unique role to play in this space and USCIS' continued support of our program validates our effectiveness in this role," said Homa Naficy, Executive Director, HPL's The American Place. "Since 2000, TAP has been at the forefront of welcoming immigrants and providing the opportunities and support they need to become fully engaged citizens."

USCIS' Citizenship and Integration grant funds help prepare lawful permanent residents (LPRs) for naturalization. USCIS focused this year on reaching remote, underserved, and vulnerable communities per Executive Order 14012, Restoring Faith in Our Legal Immigration Systems and Strengthening Integration and Inclusion Efforts for New Americans and the corresponding Interagency Strategy on Promoting Naturalization. This is a two-year grant program.

"The United States has a long history of welcoming refugees and immigrants, and we are stronger for it. Becoming a citizen is no easy feat, but the services offered by The American Place ensure more people in the Hartford community can achieve their dream of American citizenship. It's great to see federal dollars go toward this incredible program, and I'll continue pushing for funding that supports Connecticut's vibrant immigrant community," said U.S. Senator Chris Murphy.

The *English Learner Success* program sponsored by TAP at Hartford Public Library assists newcomer immigrant and refugee teens to learn English, adjust to their new environments and achieve academic success. Many graduates of the program have gone on to college and become leaders in the community. They have also applied to be U.S. citizens with the assistance of the library's immigration staff. One graduate, Honore Munyaneza, is now a junior at the University of Connecticut, majoring in business. He and his family are refugees from Rwanda. Not only did Honore recently become a U.S. citizen, he also encouraged his parents and two older sisters to apply, as well.

"Hartford has a long legacy of welcoming immigrants with open arms, including most recently, Ukrainian refugees and our Afghan allies," said Rep. John B. Larson (CT-01). "The American Place has been nationally recognized for the programs they offer, including green card services and job training opportunities. I was thrilled to support funding for The American Place in Congress to expand citizenship and naturalization services available to the Hartford community."



Another TAP program graduate, Husna Shirzai, is a sophomore at Hartford's Capital Community College, where she is studying to be a nurse. Husna and her family are refugees from Afghanistan. Husna has recently applied to be a U.S. citizen. She was also instrumental in helping her parents and two older brothers apply, as well.

"Hartford Public Library holds a proven track record of success in assisting immigrants and refugees from across the region," said HPL President and CEO, Bridget E. Quinn. "Connecticut has the 10th highest percentage of foreign-born residents in the nation, with the highest concentration in the metropolitan Hartford area. These funds will allow us to grow our current program to include an additional 200 students," said Quinn. "Helping our neighbors navigate the citizenship process is just one example of the critical work we do each day at Hartford Public Library to meet the needs of the community."

HPL's TAP offers an integrated one-stop system where clients can conveniently access both legal and educational services. "TAP offers these services at no-cost and during hours that accommodate most adult work schedules - weekends and evenings. It is also through the Library's range of educational, workforce readiness, and recreational activities offered in a highly supportive environment – open to all - that keeps our newcomers connected to us," said Naficy.

While USCIS's investment in Hartford Public Library's TAP program has resulted in a steady increase in the rate of naturalized citizens in Connecticut's capital city, the need for affordable citizenship education and naturalization services remains great. Approximately 62% of Hartford's foreign-born have not naturalized. For many, their literacy levels are insufficient to meet the English language requirements for naturalization further exacerbated by Hartford's high poverty rate of 32.75%, with 46.3% of children living in poverty. This vulnerable population is at highest-risk of experiencing immigration fraud and most susceptible to misinformation.

"Hartford has a proud history of welcoming immigrants with open arms and this \$450,000 federal grant for The American Place will bolster access to educational and legal services to help hundreds more people on their path to citizenship. The Hartford Public Library is the only library in the country to receive this award – a true testament to the outstanding services they provide. We are a nation of immigrants and I see the impact of programs like The American Place firsthand every week at naturalization ceremonies across Connecticut. I am proud to have fought for these funds and will continue to support programs that offer a beacon of hope for Connecticut's immigrant community," said U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal.

About Hartford Public Library

With roots dating to 1774, Hartford Public Library remains at the forefront of redefining the urban library experience in the 21st century. With seven locations throughout the city, the library provides education, intellectual enrichment and cultural development for thousands of children, youth and adults every year. Hartford Public Library has also gained local and national recognition for its wide range of new initiatives and partnerships designed to meet the needs of a diverse and dynamic city and region, including immigration services, employment assistance and youth leadership training. www.hplct.org.

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