



For Immediate Release

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HARTFORD PUBLIC LIBRARY RECEIVES \$250K GRANT TO BRING CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION TO IMMIGRANT YOUTH

*Partnership with Area Cooperative Educational Services will help train
teens as Citizenship Guides and instruct school staff on value of
citizenship*

(Hartford, CT) – Hartford Public Library has received a \$250,000 Innovations in Citizenship Education grant from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to launch a new program that will expand citizenship education opportunities for immigrant youth in Hartford while they are in school. Hartford Public Library was one of only two libraries nationally to have been received such an award.

Educating youth meaningfully about U.S. citizenship while they are still within the school and family contexts is of utmost importance. Citizenship lifts barriers to federal job opportunities, post-secondary financial aid or scholarships and family reunification petitions. More importantly, citizenship instills a sense of belonging to the broader community considered a key ingredient to immigrant integration and civic engagement.

Hartford Public Library's The American Place will partner with Area Cooperative Educational Services (ACES) to offer a two-pronged approach targeting hard-to-reach immigrant youth, their families, as well as their teachers. The approach will incorporate strategies that expand digital access and literacy to support citizenship education and develop new citizenship education tools and culturally responsive marketing products that can be shared nationally.

"Once again The American Place at Hartford Public Library is leading the way with an innovative program that targets an underserved population, in this case immigrant youth eligible for citizenship," said **Hartford Public Library President and CEO Bridget E. Quinn**. "We are

thankful to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services for their support of this initiative, one that we hope will be replicated in cities across the country.”

Public libraries and schools have a long history of collaboration to overcome many of the resource gaps they encounter when seeking to meet community need driven by a similar goal – to help community members gain new knowledge, skills and confidence to pursue their lives fully.

The program, which will kick off in 2023, includes two main parts. Immigrant youth enrolled in Hartford Public Schools will be recruited and trained as Citizenship Guides, with prioritization given to students in grades 11 and 12 who are 16 and older, have been a legal permanent resident for at least three years and demonstrate English proficiency. The Citizenship Guides will visit civic sites to observe democracy in action and serve as teacher aides, citizenship recruiters, patriotic programming hosts and assist at naturalization ceremonies celebrated at Hartford Public Library.

The second piece of the program will include the creation of a professional development citizenship course to inform English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers and other school staff who work with immigrant youth in K-12 schools about immigration benefits, the significance and value of citizenship, the naturalization process, referral resources, effective navigation of USCIS.gov and the avoidance of immigration fraud.

Hartford has an estimated 26,253 foreign-born residents, which make up 21.5% of its overall population of 122,105 – demographics far above the national average and 8.6% higher than any other city in the state. However, only 10,630 (38.3%) of Hartford’s foreign-born residents have achieved citizenship. Hartford Public Schools has a total student population of 17,678, with more than 22% foreign-born – the largest student immigrant population in Connecticut. An estimated 600 are 16 years old and 450 are 17 or older – a potential pool of new Americans to attract.

Despite the long-term benefits – access to more scholarship opportunities, government jobs, petitions for family members, and the right to vote – citizenship applications by youth remain undersubscribed. Family incomes, educational attainment levels and lack of accurate information is in part responsible for this trajectory.

This project will have a far-reaching national impact by addressing a critical gap in innovative programs which expands opportunities to citizenship for this underserved growing segment of immigrant populations – immigrant youth – while also providing a conduit for engaging their families.

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.