



MEDIA ADVISORY: For Immediate Release

DATE: April 17, 2019

CONTACT: Veronica Serrato, (617) 694-5949 or vserrato@projectcitizenship.org
Sovanna Pouy, (978) 454-6200 or spouy@cmaalowell.org.

SUBJECT: CMAA and Project Citizenship to bring citizenship to hundreds of Lowell residents in 2019

Lowell -- In the face of national hostility to immigrants, two nonprofit organizations are partnering to ensure that Lowell residents understand and have access to the path to citizenship. This partnership is made possible by the generous support of the Theodore Edson Parker Foundation.

Massachusetts is home to the 7th largest immigrant population in the United States. Foreign-born residents make up almost 17% of the Massachusetts workforce. Nearly 250,000 Massachusetts immigrants are eligible to become citizens, but because of fear, cost, and confusion, only 10% apply for citizenship. In 2007, the Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth named Lowell as one of 11 gateway cities in the Commonwealth. 12.5% of Lowell's residents are Cambodian immigrants, the highest proportion of residents of Cambodian origin of any place in the United States.

The government has recently taken many steps that will make the citizenship process lengthier and more difficult – increased scrutiny, longer backlogs and wait times, a denaturalization task force, threats to birthright citizenship, elimination of fee waivers for clients who receive public assistance, and increased barriers for disabled immigrants to obtain language waivers. Recently, the Cambodian community has been targeted for immigration enforcement and deportation. Project Citizenship and CMAA are joining forces to provide outreach in immigrant communities, strengthening screening processes for potential new citizens, and ensuring that Project Citizenship's 1,000 trained volunteers have the information and guidance that they need.

CMAA offers citizenship assistance every other Friday at its Lowell office, staffed by CMAA and Project Citizenship staff and volunteers.

"The City of Lowell has always been a gateway for immigrants to our country and we are proud of that heritage," said Lowell Mayor William Samaras. He added, "As Mayor of the City of Lowell, I am proud to support the work that CMAA and Project Citizenship are doing to help our immigrant communities obtain citizenship."

CMAA has partnered with Project Citizenship since 2015 and hosted a large joint citizenship workshop in June 2018 at the Lowell Senior Center. CMAA has staff and volunteers fluent in Khmer and culturally sensitive to Lowell's diverse Asian communities. Project Citizenship is recognized by the Department of Justice and has attorneys and accredited representatives who have the skills and experience to give reputable advice.

"Citizenship provides powerful rights and protections, and is the only protection against deportation," said Veronica Serrato, Executive Director of Project Citizenship. "It enables people to vote; in fact, 86% of new citizens register to vote and 73% actually vote in elections, which are much higher rates than the general public," Serrato added. "New citizens earn higher wages and help build their communities by being able to buy homes, obtain loans, and otherwise invest in the U.S. economy. And, when parents become citizens, they pass on citizenship to their minor children, who become eligible for educational opportunities available to all Americans, including scholarships and loans."

"We are proud to partner with Project Citizenship. Being a refugee myself, I see so much value in becoming naturalized. When I became a citizen in 2007, I cast my first vote in 2008 and have not stopped since then. I hope to pass this opportunity on to others in the community." said Sovanna Pouy, Executive Director of CMAA.

About Project Citizenship

Project Citizenship is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that focuses on removing the barriers to citizenship and providing free, high quality legal services to eligible immigrants in Massachusetts, in partnership with the major Boston law firms and law schools.

About CMAA

CMAA's mission is to improve the quality of life for Cambodian Americans and other minorities and economically disadvantaged persons in Lowell through educational, cultural, economic and social programs.

###