



California Immigrant Welfare Collaborative

926 "J" Street, Suite 701 ♦ Sacramento, CA 95814
Phone (916) 448-6762 ♦ Fax (916) 448-6774

LEGISLATIVE AGENDA FOR 2005

Immigrants play a vital role in California's economy and in its social and cultural life. Immigrants comprise a third of our state's workforce, and help support California's schools, public programs and infrastructure through their payment of local, state and federal taxes. Like other Californians, immigrant families need access to health care to remain productive, and a safety net to support them in difficult times.

PRESERVE VITAL WORK SUPPORT PROGRAMS AND THE SAFETY NET FOR SENIORS, THE DISABLED AND LOW WAGE WORKING FAMILIES– The Governor's budget shifts approximately \$1 billion away from critical programs that serve seniors, working families, and disabled individuals.¹ Although the Administration did not target immigrant programs specifically, immigrants who depend on essential health care and social service programs such as CalWORKs, Supplemental Security Income/State Supplementary Payment, or SSI/SSP, could be significantly harmed by the Governor's proposed cuts. The Governor's budget plan also targets key job support programs under CalWORKs, reduces wages for In-Home Support Services (IHSS) workers and would require some Medi-Cal recipients to pay new premiums, among other proposals.

ENHANCE CIVIC PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP SKILLS FOR IMMIGRANTS IN CALIFORNIA–

- ♦ **Support AB 930 (De La Torre) the New Californians Initiative.** In California, there are currently **2.7 million** immigrants eligible to naturalize², but there are not enough services to assist them through a process that can be difficult and expensive. California's naturalization rate is among the lowest in the nation³, a situation our state can ill afford. AB 930 would address this urgent need by providing comprehensive naturalization services coordinated through a collaborative, community based model.⁴ By requiring regional coordination and consistency of services, the New Californians Initiative would ensure that immigrants who are eligible to become citizens not only have access to naturalization services but also engage in a **process** toward citizenship that emphasizes increased civic engagement and skills building.
- ♦ **Preserve Funds for the Naturalization Services Program (NSP).** In his proposed budget, Governor Schwarzenegger has eliminated funds for the state's NSP program, the only source of state funds for citizenship services in California.

EXPAND ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE FOR LOW-INCOME IMMIGRANTS AND THEIR FAMILIES–

Immigrants in California are often concentrated in low-wage jobs that rarely offer health coverage. In recent years, job based insurance coverage in California has declined steadily.⁵ As a result,

¹ The Governor's budget takes away \$1 Billion dollars from CalWORKs, SSI/SSP, and IHSS programs.

² Michael Fix, Jeffrey S. Passel, and Kenneth Sucher. "Trends in Naturalization", *Immigrant Families and Workers: Facts and Perspectives Brief No. 3*. Urban Institute. September 2003.

³ U.S. Department of Homeland Security. "Estimates of the Legal Permanent Resident Population and Population Eligible to Naturalize in 2002". Prepared by Nancy F. Rytina. May 2004.

⁴ NSP currently utilizes a similar geographic breakdown. However, service areas will be based on geographic, organizational, and demographic considerations.

⁵ E. Richard Brown and Shana Alex Lavarreda. "Job based coverage Drops for Adults and children but Public Program Boost Children's Coverage." UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, Feb 2005

public health programs have become increasingly instrumental in providing access to health care coverage for working families throughout the state. CIWC supports legislative efforts to expand access to health coverage for immigrants and their families. **AB 772 (Chan)** and **SB 437 (Escutia)** would create the California for Healthy Kids program and provide comprehensive health care coverage to all children up to age 21. Increasing health coverage for children will not only improve their health outcomes, but will also increase school readiness, school performance and the potential for life long learning.⁶ CIWC also supports **SB 840 (Kuehl)**, which would ensure access to health coverage for all Californians through a state-sponsored single-payer plan.

END BURDENSOME BARRIERS TO STATE BENEFITS PROGRAMS- AB 696 (Chu) eliminates the Statewide Finger Imaging System (SFIS). The SFIS program requires CalWORKs and food stamp applicants, including parents who are applying only for their children, to submit photos and fingerprints. This unnecessary requirement imposes additional barriers on immigrant families who already may be reluctant to seek essential benefits, without reducing fraud. California could save approximately \$11.4 million per year if it eliminated this wasteful program.

AB 696 also cuts red tape by reducing income-reporting requirements for Food Stamps and CalWORKs recipients. Currently, recipients in California have to fill out twice as much paperwork as recipients in most other states—an unnecessary burden on families and program administrators alike. In addition, AB 696 allows Medi-Cal recipients to be categorically eligible for food stamps. By eliminating repetitious steps in the application process, administrators will be able to enroll families more quickly and easily.

⁶ *Ibid.*