



California Immigrant Welfare Collaborative

1225 8th Street, Suite 590 ♦ Sacramento, CA 95814
Phone (916) 448-6762 ♦ Fax (916) 448-6774

AB 2060 (De La Torre)–Naturalization Service Program – FACT SHEET

In California, there are **2.7 million immigrants** who are eligible to naturalize¹, but there are not enough services to assist them through a process that can be difficult and expensive.² Naturalization is a key entry point into full civic and political participation. As immigrants integrate into society, their investment in the health of our schools, businesses and infrastructure increase.

Why now?

California's naturalization rate of 53% is among the lowest in the nation.³ Only 8 other states have lower rates than California. If you look only at the six states that are the major destinations for immigrants, California has a lower naturalization rate than all of them, except for Texas. With a modest investment into its naturalization services, California would be able to take advantage of the benefits these new citizens bring.

What does AB 2060 do?

AB 2060 will strengthen the ability of immigrants to contribute to their communities as new citizens upon naturalization by:

- Recognizing the continuing importance of the state-funded Naturalization Services Program (NSP) that offers critical programs and services toward citizenship.
- Encouraging coordination of existing services through collaborative, community-based models that have the capacity to reach California's diverse immigrant communities.

Currently, it costs approximately \$400 to apply for citizenship and applicants must have a working knowledge of English and be able to pass a civics test that includes questions about U.S. history and how our government functions. The "New Californians Act" will provide referrals for language training through citizenship programs and services that can assist limited English proficient immigrants to adapt more quickly to their life in the United States. Better English proficiency among immigrants has been linked to other measures of achievement, including higher wages, increased job retention and better productivity on the job.⁴

California stands to benefit from higher naturalization rates:

Naturalization confers the right to vote and encourages immigrants to participate more fully in our civic and political life. As immigrants integrate into our communities, their investment into the health of our schools, businesses and neighborhoods increases. Immigrant entrepreneurs contribute significantly to our economy and help make communities thrive. Citizenship helps keep immigrant entrepreneurs here, contributing to our state.

Our neighborhoods, communities and cities become stronger when all residents can participate in decisions that affect them and their families. In California, the impact of non-citizens' inability to participate in the electoral process is profound. Data from the 2000 Census shows that California has at least 85 cities where non-citizen adults make up more than 40% of the voting population. In Los Angeles, one in three adults is a non-citizen⁵. The New Californians Act will help build the base of people who **vote** in California.

¹ Michael Fix, Jeffrey S. Passel, and Kenneth Sucher. "Trends in Naturalization," *Immigrant Families & Workers*. Facts and Perspectives Brief No.3. Urban Institute. September 2003

² For example, the fee to apply for naturalization is \$330; there is also a fee for a biometric identifier of \$70.

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 A. Gonzalez. "The Acquisition and Labor Market Value of Four English Skills: New Evidence from NALS." *Contemporary Economic Policy*. July 2000.

⁵ Avila, Joaquin, Esq. UCLA Chicano Research Center. "Political Apartheid in California: Consequences of Excluding a Growing Noncitizen Population." *Latino Policy and Issues Brief*, No.9, December 2003.