

## CIPC 2007 Legislative Agenda

Immigrants play a vital role in California's success as one of the world's largest economies. They pay taxes and are an essential part of California's workforce and economic growth.<sup>1</sup> The children of these immigrants represent our state's future and are critical to the vitality and growth of the labor force in the coming decades. Yet immigrant families and their U.S. citizen children are often unable to secure the healthcare and basic services they need to lead healthy and full lives.<sup>2</sup> For the well-being of all Californians, legislators must prioritize immigrant integration - by guaranteeing access to basic health care and other services, advocating for much-needed policies at the federal level, and ensuring the full integration of immigrants into California's economic and civic life.

**Improve Access to Affordable, Meaningful Health Care for All** – Everyone in California, regardless of immigration status should be able to secure affordable, comprehensive health insurance through public or private coverage. Covering all children in the state is a critical first step and is supported by the vast majority of Californians.<sup>3</sup> Ensuring affordable, meaningful coverage to adults, however, is necessary to promote healthy communities. To do otherwise, presents a public health risk.

Solutions to California's health insurance crisis should maximize federal revenues while keeping state and county safety net programs strong. Safety net services must remain available to the uninsured or underinsured who rely on the state or county as a last resort for health care.

Californians should also support national efforts to restore equity for immigrants to Medicaid and SCHIP by supporting the **Immigrant Children's Health Improvement Act (ICHIA)**. ICHIA was introduced in the Senate as S. 764 and in the House of Representatives as H.R. 1308. Support for ICHIA will enable California to increase federal revenues to help ensure that more Californians can get the health care they need.

**Maintain California's Safety-Net for Immigrants** – Governor Schwarzenegger's proposed budget includes \$465 million in cuts to the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program, which provides cash assistance and services to eligible low-income families with children. The Governor's plan also denies a cost of living adjustment to low-income families for the third consecutive year. CalWORKs was created with strong bi-partisan support in 1997, and was signed into law by Republican Governor Pete Wilson. The program was based on the principle that low-income children (80% of the CalWORKs caseload) need care even if their parents are ineligible for aid.

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<sup>1</sup> "Looking Forward: Immigrant Contributions to the Golden State," California Immigrant Welfare Collaborative, Spring 2006

<sup>2</sup> "Opportunities & Challenges for the California Economy" California Economic Growth Chapter 2, 2006 Edition. Center for the Continuing Study of the California Economy.

<sup>3</sup> "New Poll Shows 83% of Voters Overwhelmingly Support Proposals to Ensure All California Kids Have Health Insurance," United Way, May 17, 2006. [http://www.greenbergresearch.com/articles/1695/2025\\_UWpr.pdf](http://www.greenbergresearch.com/articles/1695/2025_UWpr.pdf)

Punitive policies have not been shown to increase work participation or to move families towards self-sufficiency.<sup>4</sup> In fact, sanctioned families tend to need the most assistance in order to become self-sufficient.<sup>5</sup> Immigrants in particular face many challenges to securing and maintaining employment in the CalWORKs Program, including lack of English proficiency, mental and physical health conditions, and the lack of access to vital work supports and services such as child care, mental health, substance abuse services, job training and transportation.<sup>6</sup>

CalWORKs families – those who least can afford it – have had their COLAs suspended or their grants reduced in 12 of the past 18 years. In high-cost areas, such as the Bay Area, grants from CalWORKs have lost ground to California's rising housing costs.

**Prioritize Immigrant Integration** – To successfully integrate immigrant families into the state's economic, political and civic life, we must provide them with citizenship services, support programs, and civic participation opportunities. All Californians benefit when our diverse communities are healthy and strong.

➤ **Increase funding for the Naturalization Services Program** – NSP is a program that provides citizenship assistance to a fraction of the **3.2 million lawful permanent residents** (LPRs) who are eligible for naturalization in California. Studies show that as immigrants naturalize their civic participation and economic contributions to California increase.

➤ **Establish an Office of Immigrant Affairs, SB 1 (Cedillo)** This bill would coordinate existing state services and programs for immigrants and their families, serve as a repository of information on immigrant affairs, and promote cooperation and understanding between government agencies and immigrant families. Other states with smaller immigrant populations like Illinois and Utah already have state-funded offices dedicated to immigrant and/or ethnic affairs. The time is right for California to coordinate its fragmented approach to immigrant policies and programs.

➤ **Oppose Proposed Hikes to Citizenship Fees** – The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services Department (USCIS) is proposing an 80% fee increase for citizenship applicants from \$330 to \$595 for adults and from \$255 to \$460 for children and a 178% fee increase for lawful permanent residence applicants from \$325 to \$905.<sup>7</sup> This fee hike would create a nearly insurmountable barrier for California's legal permanent residents who want to naturalize. **Assembly Joint Resolution 18 (Solario)** memorializes the California Legislature's opposition to this unfair proposed increase in the naturalization application fees.

➤ **Support Comprehensive Immigration Reform & Oppose Punitive Measures** – Californians understand that immigrants work hard, pay taxes and contribute to our economy and communities. They recognize that our immigration system is failing, which is why the majority of Californians **support comprehensive immigration reform** that provides a path to legalization for immigrants who have been working in this country, learning English and paying taxes. Californians should oppose policies that punish hard-working immigrants and undermine our ability to protect health and safety. They should **oppose unjust immigration raids** that spread fear and victimize entire families, including citizens and lawfully present immigrants. The raids and other proposals targeting immigrants promote discrimination, traumatize children and jeopardize public health and safety. California's immigrant communities deserve an immigration system that rewards hard work and values families.

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4 The California Budget Project: The Governor's 2007-08 CalWORKs Proposals: Summary and Context, January 9, 2007, citations provided.

5 The California Budget Project: The Governor's 2007-08 CalWORKs Proposals: Summary and Context, January 9, 2007, citations provided.

6 Asian Pacific American Legal Services, Immigrant and Refugee Children Left Behind: A Focus group Study, (February 2002).

7 "Immigration Facts," Migration Policy Institute, February 2007, No. 15

A Statewide Partnership of:

**APALC** Asian Pacific American Legal Center • **NILC** National Immigration Law Center • **CHIRLA** Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles • **SIREN** Services Immigrant Rights & Education Network •