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Immigrants' Day of Action in Albany, February 10, 2009
Issue Background

SUPPORT CITIZENSHIP, REFUGEE & ENGLISH PROGRAMS

Few things are more critical to immigrants' success than learning English and becoming a citizen.

- More than four million New Yorkers—over 20 percent of the state's population—are foreign-born (twice the national average).
- More than 1.1 million New Yorkers are eligible for citizenship, and 400,000 more will become eligible in the coming years.
- More than one million New Yorkers do not speak English well enough to become a citizen.
- Fewer than 60,000 seats in free or low-cost government-funded adult English classes are available each year.

While we recognize the scale of the challenge Governor Paterson faces in steering New York State through these difficult economic times, we strongly disagree with his decision to slash critical services and programs for the most vulnerable New Yorkers. The only two immigrant-specific programs offered by the state—the NYS Citizenship Initiative and the NYS Refugee Resettlement Assistance Program—are facing deep cuts of over 50 percent and 20 percent, respectively. Funding for these programs was grossly inadequate to begin with; these cuts mean that even fewer immigrants will find the help they need to resettle in the United States, learn English, or become U.S. citizens.

NYS Citizenship Initiative

In the governor's FY 2010 executive budget proposal, the NYS Citizenship Initiative (NYSCI) is cut by over 20 percent, down to \$1.854 million (compared with \$2.3 million in FY 2009). These funds support 20 non-profit agencies across the state in offering ESL classes and U.S. history and civics classes to immigrants on the road to citizenship. They provide competent citizenship legal services to immigrants through the entire, multi-year naturalization process. The NYSCI funds training and technical assistance to citizenship service providers on immigration and nationality law to ensure that all citizenship service providers offer high-quality citizenship legal services to help protect immigrants from being preyed upon by fraudulent immigration service providers.

However, the availability of authorized and high-quality citizenship service providers in New York State does not meet the demand for such services. With over 1.1 million New Yorkers eligible for citizenship, and 400,000 more to become eligible in the coming years, the NYSCI is just a drop in the bucket of what is needed to seriously address the demand for citizenship services. As application fees have skyrocketed, more applicants also are seeking fee waivers,

which require additional legal assistance to complete. Slashing funding to the NYSCI will only exacerbate the problems that overburdened citizenship service providers already face, in turn further delaying immigrants' opportunity to fully integrate into our society.

NYS Refugee Resettlement Assistance Program

Through this program, non-profit providers offer refugees, asylees, and victims of human trafficking crucial case management and self-sufficiency skills, such as ESL and job training, that assure integration into the mainstream in their new community. The FY 2010 executive budget proposal guts funding for this program by 50 percent, down to \$1.854, which includes wiping out TANF funds and cutting tax levy funds by \$500,000 (down from \$3.7 million in 2009). There is no other funding source targeted to this population when they lose eligibility for federal refugee social services funding. These services are also unique because they are provided in a culturally sensitive manner.

Recommendations

We urge Governor Paterson and the State Legislature to:

1. Restore the proposed cuts in the Executive Budget and increase funds for the **NYS Citizenship Initiative** (FY 2009—\$2.3 million; FY 2010 Proposal—\$1.854 million).
2. Restore the proposed cuts in the Executive Budget and increase funds for the **NYS Refugee Resettlement Assistance Program** (FY 2009—the \$3.7 million; FY 2010 Proposal—\$1.854 million).
3. Restore funding for **Adult Literacy Education (ALE)** for ESOL classes (FY'09 - \$5.9 million; FY'10 Executive Proposal - \$5.3 million or a 26% cut).
4. Restore **TANF funding for ESOL services** as a separate budget line item and maintain a 200%-of-poverty eligibility level (FY'08 - \$2 million; FY'09 - \$1 million; FY'10 - Eliminated).
5. Preserve **Employment Preparation Education (EPE)** and open it up to community-based organizations (FY'09 - \$96 million).
6. Re-establish the **EDGE (Education for Gainful Employment) Program** at \$2.5 million for FY'10.



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