

Immigrants' Day of Action in Albany, March 2, 2010

SUPPORT WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT WITH FEDERAL STIMULUS FUNDING

New Yorkers of all backgrounds feel the pain of our economic downturn, which has affected every community in our state with economic uncertainty, unemployment, and cuts in critical services. The federal stimulus bill, known as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, represented the single largest investment in the American economy in recent history, offering an opportunity to create new jobs and help vulnerable and distressed communities.

More than 20 percent of New York State's population is foreign-born (twice the national average), and more than one million New Yorkers do not speak English well. A lack of proficiency in English remains one of the primary barriers to employment and economic mobility: 1 in 3 adults with limited English proficiency lives below 100 percent of the federal poverty guideline, and nearly 2 in 3 live below 200 percent of the poverty line.

Immigrant workers have been hit hard by the economic downturn, suffering significant job losses in the construction industry and allied trades as well as in the service sector.

Given that immigrant and limited-English-proficient workers are woven into the fabric of the economy and are a large proportion of the current and future labor force, we had expected Governor Paterson to send a positive message to immigrant and limited-English-proficient workers and students by addressing their needs in our state's use of stimulus funds.

Unfortunately, the state failed to invest much in training or adult education programs for immigrant workers. At the same time, Governor Paterson recently proposed huge cuts to programs to help immigrants resettle in the U.S., learn English, and become citizens, exacerbating the difficulties facing New Yorkers who are still learning English.

Creating new jobs is not enough. We must ensure that New Yorkers have the skills and education they need to *get* those jobs. Unless we invest in job training and adult education for these workers, their job prospects will be bleak, and we risk diluting the effectiveness of the "recovery" provisions of stimulus funding in New York.

We urge Governor Paterson to distribute stimulus funding in a way that expands equity, encourages transparency and accountability, and actively engages communities as recovery partners. Similarly, we call on the state to evaluate past expenditures using the same criteria.

Recommendations:

1. **Protect critical programs that help immigrant New Yorkers gain the necessary skills to enter the workforce and help rebuild our economy.**
 - A. **Restore \$695,000 to the New York State Citizenship Initiative.** In the governor's FY 2011 executive budget proposal, the NYS Citizenship Initiative is cut by over 28 percent. 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 and better jobs.
 - B. **Restore \$2.6 million to Adult Literacy Education to provide adult literacy services.** Despite the vast need for adult English classes for immigrants, fewer than 60,000 free or low-cost government-funded adult English classes are available, leaving 94 percent of the need for adult education classes unmet. The drastic cut of 62

percent to Adult Literacy Education proposed by the governor means that more programs will be forced to turn away larger numbers of students.

- C. **Use stimulus education funds to restore \$1.4 billion in committed education funding**, which would bring the amount owed by the state in the Campaign for Fiscal Equity settlement down to \$4.2 billion. The state must ensure that New York City and other districts with large ELL populations get their fair share of funding. Part of the solution involves raising the ELL weight in the funding formula from 0.5 to 1.0 in order to drive more funds to high-ELL districts.

2. **Strengthen transparency and coordination of stimulus funds.**

- A. **Increased transparency.** Provide a detailed accounting of the amount of stimulus funding allocated to programs for immigrant and limited-English-proficient workers.
- B. **Treat ESL as a key workforce development strategy.** Integrate ESL into workforce development training curricula (to reduce language barriers in workforce development programs). Create a targeted request for proposals for workforce development programs that include an ESL component.
- C. **Utilize local community-based organizations as service providers.** Too frequently, local grassroots community organizations that have the linguistic and cultural connections to target populations are unable to access state funding because of their small size.