

# NYIC IMMIGRATION NEWS

*An update by the New York Immigration Coalition on issues affecting immigrants and their communities.*

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## IMMIGRATION

### Update on Special Call-In Registration

The INS is pressing forward with Special Call-In Registration, having been mandated by the Attorney General to register, photograph and fingerprint hundreds of thousands of nonimmigrant Arab and Muslim males who were admitted to the U.S. prior to September 2002. Special Call-In Registration applies to nonimmigrant males, age 16 or over, who are citizens or nationals of designated countries (25 countries thus far, 24 of which are Arab or Muslim). The program does NOT apply to, among others, women, lawful permanent residents, dual nationals holding U.S. citizenship, refugees and asylees, certain parolees, certain asylum applicants, and persons who entered without inspection.

The NYIC and advocates around the country strongly oppose the Special Call-In Registration program, both because it has singled out Arabs and Muslims for selective enforcement and because of problems and rights violations that have arisen from the implementation of the program. The program brought about large public protests, particularly in regions where the INS detained those registrants who have pending applications for permanent residency. Advocates also note that Special Call-In Registration fails as a security measure because it focuses on individuals who are attempting to comply with immigration laws. Finally, the program is having a disastrous effect on other INS services because significant resources have been diverted from INS adjudications and services units to deal with the registration program, causing drastic declines in naturalization, adjustment, and EAD processing. With an approaching February 21 deadline for Group 3 countries, INS may face larger numbers of Pakistani registrants than all other groups combined.

A group of lawyers convened by the NYIC assisted registrants at the INS NY District Office in the days leading up to the January 10 deadline for Group 2 countries. The numbers of registrants grew steeply each day, peaking at an estimated 400 registrants on January 10. Registrations continued until 3am and 6am on the final two days. While New York did not see the kind of mass arrests and detentions that took place in California and other districts, many registrants are being issued Notices to Appear at immigration court, which begins the process of deportation.

In response to community groups raising objections regarding lack of full attorney access and lack of interpretation services, the NY District Director has recently made assurances to advocates that attorneys will

have full access to their clients throughout the registration process and that interpretation services will be provided in cases where registrants not comfortable with English are required to answer questions under oath.

In response to the great need for information and assistance regarding special registration in immigrant communities, the NYIC is working with community-based organizations (CBOs) and mosques to hold community education events and legal clinics throughout the City. As the February 21 and March 28 deadlines approach, the NYIC is continuing to train and place volunteer attorneys and interpreters and train community groups to assist registrants. Finally, through the legal clinics, the NYIC seeks to identify cases in which a registrant has possible relief from deportation and place those cases with legal service providers.

On the legislative front, the Senate recently passed the FY 2003 appropriations bill, which includes a provision to suspend funding for the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS). The NSEERS program includes the Special Call-In Registration. The sponsors of the amendment are calling for a halt in the program until Congress has more information about the effectiveness of the program in fighting terrorism. The House version does not include this provision. As the two houses go into conference, please contact your representative to support the Senate version, suspending funding for this controversial program. For more information, contact Norman at ext. 235.

### INS Fees are Reduced

INS will no longer collect the portion of fees used to fund asylum and refugee services and the fee waiver and exemption programs. Visit [www.ins.gov](http://www.ins.gov) for more information.

## HEALTH CARE ACCESS

### New HHC Plus Medical Payment Program for Uninsured, Undocumented Immigrants

As of November 1, 2002, low-income adult immigrants who are undocumented may enroll in a new program called HHC Plus, which allows patients to pay just \$15 per visit for care at NYC Health and Hospitals Corporation (HHC) hospitals, clinics, and other facilities. Enrollment in HHC Plus lasts for one year and covers a full range of medical and mental health services. The patient is expected to pay a pharmacy administrative fee of \$10 per visit, regardless of the number of prescriptions.

Financial counselors at HHC have been instructed to screen all uninsured patients, and if appropriate, to ask

patients to apply for Medicaid, Family Health Plus or Child Health Plus. Undocumented immigrants are not eligible for Medicaid (except in emergencies) or Family Health Plus; children who are undocumented are eligible for Child Health Plus. Undocumented adults who receive care through HHC can enroll in HHC Plus if they provide the requested eligibility information during the screening process and if they would qualify for Family Health Plus based on the income requirements, i.e., parents may earn up to 150% of the federal poverty level, and childless adults may earn up to 100%.

In general, if an HHC patient does not provide the requested eligibility information during the screening, or if the patient's income is too high to qualify for Family Health Plus or HHC Plus, the patient will be asked to pay sliding-scale fees of \$20, \$40 or \$60 per visit, depending on income, and up to \$40 per visit in pharmacy fees.

HHC operates many hospitals, clinics, and other facilities where all New Yorkers, including undocumented immigrants, have a right to receive medical care. The HHC hospitals are Bellevue, Coney Island, Elmhurst, Harlem, Jacobi, Kings County, Lincoln, Metropolitan, North Central Bronx, Queens, and Woodhull. For more information, call Adam at ext. 222 or Su Yon at ext. 232.

## NEW YORK STATE BUDGET

### **Governor Pataki's Budget for 2003: Billion Dollar Cuts in Education and Health Care**

On January 29, Governor Pataki submitted his state fiscal year 2003 budget of over \$90 billion to the State Legislature. Faced with a more-than \$2 billion deficit for 2002 and a \$9 billion deficit for the 2003 fiscal year that begins in April, Governor Pataki balances the budget with a combination of new fees, increased borrowing, bonding long-term tobacco settlement revenues, reduction of the state work force, and most troubling, major cuts in education, higher education and health care. Governor Pataki rejected proposals backed by many not-for-profit organizations including the NYCIC, and unions, to impose temporary tax increases on New York's wealthiest residents, and to close corporate tax loopholes as a way of generating as much as \$3 billion. If the Governor had agreed to the new taxes, there would not be a need for more than \$1 billion in cuts in education and health care.

In education, the Governor's proposal cuts state aid for education by \$1.2 billion as compared with last year. As school districts have been forced to raise local property taxes due to inflationary costs and the State's new standards, there is little chance that localities will be able to replace the reduced state aid. Furthermore, wage increases won by NYC's teachers will cost an estimated \$500 million this year, so even if funding stayed the same, programs would have to be cut. Tuition will be raised by more than \$1,000 for CUNY and SUNY under the Governor's proposal, and the Tuition Assistance Program also faces cuts.

In health care, various surcharges and taxes are proposed for health care providers, which will draw down additional federal funds. Cuts in reimbursement to hospitals, clinics and nursing homes are also part of the plan. Governor Pataki also proposes reducing the income eligibility level for Family Health Plus from 150% of poverty to 133% of the poverty level—a significant reduction that will eliminate eligibility for this important program of thousands of New Yorkers. In addition, in human services, \$250 million in TANF funding is being used for the Tuition Assistance Program, resulting in fewer TANF funds for ESL, literacy and other education and employment-related activities.

On the positive side, Governor Pataki continues his support with \$2.5 million in funding for citizenship programs, \$4 million for the NYS Refugee Assistance Program, and \$11.2 million for bilingual categorical grants. He also plans to trade about \$6.3 billion in long-term tobacco settlement revenues for an immediate \$4.2 billion infusion that he would use over three years to fill the budget holes.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### **Join the DREAM Act Task Force**

The NYCIC recently convened a task force for organizations committed to working on the passage of the DREAM Act. The new Task Force will meet regularly to coordinate advocacy work. The next meeting is February 12, from 4-5pm at the NYCIC offices. To join the task force or for more information, contact Minerva at ext. 238.



### **ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE RIGHT NOW TO HELP PROTECT IMMIGRANTS' RIGHTS**

1. **Call your Senators and Representatives and ask them to stop the discriminatory and ineffective Special Call-In Registration program.** Ask them to support the provision to suspend funding for NSEERS contained in the Senate version of the FY 2003 appropriations bill. Capitol switchboard: (202) 224-3121.
2. **Experienced immigration attorneys needed!** The NYCIC is seeking attorneys experienced in immigration law to volunteer for special registration legal clinics, assist registrants at INS, or mentor pro bono attorneys. Please contact Norman at ext. 235 if you can volunteer time and/or expertise.

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