

# NYIC IMMIGRATION NEWS

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

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## BIAS CRIME

### **Firebombing of Immigrant Family's Home Stirs Fear But Unites Long Island Community**

In the early hours of Saturday, July 5, assailants tossed a firebomb through the bedroom window of a house in Farmingville, New York, setting the house immediately ablaze. Five Mexican immigrants sleeping inside escaped only because next-door neighbors saw the fire and woke up the family by shouting and banging on their door. The five – Maria Garcia, 23, Sergio Perez, 33, their 5-year-old daughter Laura, 1-year-old son Sergio Jr., and Perez's brother Hugo, 27 – lost everything, including \$5,500 in savings. They have been staying with relatives since the attack.

Suffolk County police are now investigating the attack as a possible bias crime. The Justice Department and FBI also have begun a preliminary investigation to determine whether the firebombing violated federal civil rights laws. Many believe the incident clearly was motivated by anti-immigrant hate, given the location of the house, prior incidents of violence against Mexican day laborers, and the presence of organized anti-immigrant radicals in Farmingville. The house is next door to another house where, three years ago, two Mexican day laborers were lured away by white men posing as contractors and then brutally beaten with a crowbar and slashed with a knife.

A local anti-immigrant group known as SACHEM Quality of Life has stoked tensions in Farmingville and surrounding communities over Mexican day laborers for years. In June, *Newsday* reported that the group recently suffered a split in its ranks, with a hardline faction seizing control of the group. Immigrant advocates saw the split as an ominous development, fearing an escalation in violence from militant radicals that have spoken of taking up arms against immigrant day laborers and their families.

The attack has generated an outpouring of support from Farmingville residents, including the native-born community, who are tired of being labeled intolerant and racist based on the actions of a small group of anti-immigrant agitators and outsider extremists who do not represent the community. Many residents also blamed Suffolk County officials for rejecting plans for a day labor hiring site, which would solve problems arising from large numbers of day laborers having to gather on the street.

Donations to the Garcia/Perez family can be sent care of the Central American Refugee Center (CARECEN) – see the Action Box for instructions. The American Friends Service Committee, Brookhaven Citizens for Peaceful Solutions, CARECEN, Catholic Charities, Long Island Immigrant Alliance, and other groups are planning

to hold a prayer vigil in the near future. For more information, email Patrick Young of CARECEN at [pycarecen@aol.com](mailto:pycarecen@aol.com).

## EDUCATION

### **Mayor Bloomberg Announces \$20 Million Reform Plan for English Language Learners**

On June 24, Mayor Bloomberg and Schools Chancellor Joel Klein announced their long-awaited reform plan on bilingual education at a press conference in Battery Park. Under the plan, the City will allocate an additional \$20 million to strengthen English Language Learner (ELL) instruction.

The Department of Education (DOE) will create a new ELL teacher academy and hire 107 new ELL instructional specialists to support teachers in the classrooms. The DOE also will offer new after-school programs, strengthen existing Saturday programs, and open a new Asian Study and Dual Language High School in lower Manhattan that will provide instruction in English and Mandarin, marking the first of 13 new dual-language programs planned citywide. In addition, the DOE will use the additional funds to provide ELL students with supplemental materials starting this fall and to purchase library materials geared to ELL students.

The reform plan includes many recommendations put forward by the NYIC and Advocates for Children in a 10-point reform agenda they released earlier this year. Although the Mayor's plan does provide hope of improvement for immigrant and other ELL students, the NYIC and other immigrant advocates remain concerned that the plan lacks adequate funding to compensate for chronic under-funding of the past and continued under-funding from the federal and state governments to educate ELL students. For more information, contact Minerva at ext. 238.

### **Ten-Year Lawsuit Ends in Landmark Victory for New York City Schoolchildren**

In a four-to-one decision, the New York Court of Appeals ruled on June 26 that New York State was not meeting its constitutional obligation to provide the children of New York City with a "sound basic education." The court rejected an earlier ruling that an eighth-grade education was adequate in providing a high-quality education. The court also ordered the State to revise its current financial formula by July 2004, concluding that New York City's schools receive state-aid payments that are among the lowest on a per-pupil basis. The court, however, did not specify how much money it would take to correct the formula, but instead ordered the State Legislature to institute a fair state-aid formula that

would ensure adequate funding in all 600 school districts in New York State.

Congratulations to the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE), which brought the lawsuit, on this landmark victory! For more information on the ruling and lawsuit, contact Jessica Garcia of the CFE at 212-867-8455 ext. 218 or at [jgarcia@cfequity.org](mailto:jgarcia@cfequity.org).

## HEALTH CARE

### **Fight for ICHIA Continues as House and Senate Seek Compromise on Medicare Reform Legislation**

The House and Senate each have passed a Medicare reform bill and now must negotiate a final version in conference committee for President Bush to sign into law. Senator Bob Graham (D-Florida) introduced language into the Senate bill modeled after the Immigrant Children's Health Improvement Act of 2003 (ICHIA – S. 845, H.R. 1689). That language would allow states to provide Medicaid and State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) coverage to legal immigrant children and pregnant women. The proposed restorations of Medicaid and SCHIP were attacked by the Bush Administration and Senator Jeff Sessions (R-Alabama), who argued that Congress intended to bar legal immigrants from public benefits in 1996 and that restorations should not be included without a debate. The Senate defeated Senator Sessions' proposal, and the immigrant restorations have been included in the final Senate bill. Although the NYIC opposes much of the content of the House and Senate Medicare bills, advocates are urged to contact their members of Congress and register support for the Medicaid/SCHIP restorations for recent legal immigrants (see Action Box for contact details). The message is that immigrant Medicaid restorations must be part of any final Medicare bill passed by Congress. For more information, contact Adam at ext. 222 or Su Yon at ext. 232.

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

### **House Passes Weak WIA Reauthorization Bill for LEPs; Senate Version Being Developed**

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA), which is the major source of federal funding for most workforce development programs, including job training, adult basic education, and ESL classes, is scheduled to be reauthorized in Congress by September 30.

On May 8, the House of Representatives passed the Workforce Reinvestment and Adult Education Act (H.R. 1261) to reauthorize WIA. Unfortunately, H.R. 1261 does not address the needs of limited-English-proficient (LEP) job seekers in a meaningful way. The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee is developing a WIA reauthorization bill that may be introduced after the August recess.

Meanwhile, Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, a member of the HELP Committee, will be introducing a separate WIA reauthorization bill that focuses on LEP

priorities to better meet the needs of immigrants and LEP persons. In early July, the NYIC sent a letter to Senator Clinton with more than 50 groups signed on in support, urging her to continue her strong leadership in developing a WIA reauthorization proposal that would significantly improve access to job training and English language classes for immigrants and LEP persons. If you would like to use the letter in your own advocacy (see Action Box), please contact Benjamin at ext. 234.

## CITY BUDGET

### **City Budget Avoids Major Cuts This Year**

On June 27, the New York City Council passed a \$44.5 billion budget after months of negotiations between the Council and the Mayor. The Council urged the Mayor to restore approximately \$350 million in service cuts, and the Mayor ultimately abandoned \$205 million of those planned cuts. One important restoration concerned the Immigrant Services Initiative, which funds ESOL and civics instruction as well as legal services for more than 40 non-profit groups. The final budget included \$1.8 million for the program, down slightly from \$2 million in FY2003 (and \$2.5 million in FY2002).

The budget agreement closes a deficit that the City estimated at \$6.4 billion just seven months ago. In the end, while many groups "survived" this year's budget, most New Yorkers will be negatively impacted by increased taxes, fees, and tuition levels. It is imperative that the business sector pay its fair share (equalizing business taxes and closing corporate loopholes) to help close next year's projected budget gap of \$2 billion, which does not factor in possible union contract agreements. For more information, contact José at ext. 241.



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

1. **Donations to Firebombing Victims.** Send donations to the Central American Refugee Center (CARECEN), 91 N. Franklin St., Suite 211, Hempstead, NY 11550. Checks should be made out to CARECEN, with the words "Fire Fund" in the memo line.
2. **ICHIA Restorations.** Call your members of Congress to say that immigrant Medicaid restorations must be part of any final Medicare bill passed by Congress. Capitol switchboard: 202-224-3121.
3. **WIA Reauthorization.** Call Senator Clinton's office to let her know that you support her WIA reauthorization bill, which addresses the needs of immigrants and LEPs. Capitol switchboard: 202-224-3121.

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