

NYIC IMMIGRATION NEWS

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

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LANGUAGE ACCESS

City Hall Protest TODAY at NOON! Mayor Voices Opposition to Intro. 38A; Illegal Discrimination Continues Against Persons With Limited English

While the City's public advocate, comptroller, and the overwhelming majority of the City Council, including Speaker Miller, support Intro. 38A, Mayor Bloomberg has spoken out publicly against the need for this important language access legislation. Intro. 38A, *The Equal Access to Health and Human Services Act*, would protect the civil rights of New York City's immigrant communities and ensure equal access to emergency social services for all New Yorkers, by requiring the Human Resources Administration to provide urgently-needed interpretation and translation services to limited-English-proficient (LEP) New Yorkers who are seeking Food Stamps, Medicaid, or public assistance.

During his weekly radio address on Friday, October 31st, the Mayor responded to a question regarding his stance on Intro. 38A by claiming that the City already has the ability to provide services "no matter what language you speak" through bilingual workers and its telephone language line, and that the bill would be too expensive and would require the City to "cut a whole bunch of services" in order to provide "every single service in about 14 or 15 languages." The Mayor's comments are inaccurate and disingenuous, because the bill covers only six languages and would cost a modest \$6 million (in a \$40-billion-plus city budget) after being phased in over four years; moreover, the City's current way of coping with LEP individuals is haphazard and unreliable, lacks standards, and ultimately fails to meet the needs of LEP individuals seeking services. The Mayor also said that the City has "no record of complaints" about problems getting services due to language barriers – a statement that ignores the dozens of documented cases of language access problems presented to his administration.

In recent negotiations, the Bloomberg administration has expressed reservations about the current version of the bill and has sought changes that would eliminate reporting requirements and draw out implementation over seven years instead of four.

In his current stance, the Mayor is failing to recognize that language barriers continue to prevent large numbers of immigrant New Yorkers from accessing critical services – a situation that the federal government found to be illegal discrimination against LEP individuals in violation of Title VI of the Civil

Rights Act. Concerned advocates need to make their voices heard by calling and sending a letter to the Mayor urging him to support Intro. 38A in its current form. Please also join advocates for a press conference on the steps of City Hall on Thursday, November 6th, at 12 noon, to call on the Mayor to support the bill. For more information, call José at ext. 241.

IMMIGRATION

Nightmare of Re-Registration for Arab and Muslim Immigrants Approaches

November 15th, 2003 will mark the one-year anniversary of the beginning of the now-infamous Special Call-In Registration program. Call-in registration required nonimmigrant males from 25 mostly Arab and Muslim countries to appear at immigration offices to be photographed, fingerprinted, and questioned. Of the more than 82,000 individuals registered, more than 13,000 were placed in deportation proceedings.

Unfortunately, the nightmare of Special Registration is approaching again for Arab and Muslim immigrants, as the requirement to re-register annually with the immigration authorities will force tens of thousands of immigrants to report to federal authorities for another round of hostile scrutiny. Call-in registrants are required to re-register within ten days of the one-year anniversary of the date when they first registered.

The NYIC and its partners in the Special Registration Project continue to advocate for the termination of the program and the discontinuance of all removal proceedings resulting from special registration. The Project is organizing a protest/media event outside 26 Federal Plaza on Monday, November 17th, in order to focus media and public attention on this unjust and discriminatory program that has been implemented at great cost to both taxpayers and immigrant communities while yielding no gains in national security. For more information, call Norman at ext. 235 or Karin at ext 244.

Senate Judiciary Committee Passes Watered-Down Version of DREAM Act

On October 23rd, the Senate Judiciary Committee voted 16 to 3 to support the DREAM Act (S. 1545) with major amendments to the legislation. S. 1545 would create a path to legal residency for undocumented students and eliminate restrictions on a state's ability to provide in-state tuition to residents without regard to immigration status.

Under S. 1545, students with good moral character who entered the United States before the age of 16 and maintained continuous physical presence in the United States for at least 5 years prior to the date of enactment would qualify for *conditional* permanent resident status upon acceptance to college, graduation from high school, or award of a GED certificate. Conditional permanent resident status would be granted for six years, after which the student must petition to have the conditions removed. During the six years, students must graduate from college or accrue at least two years of higher education or military service.

During the mark-up session, Senators Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) and Charles Grassley (R-IA) compromised the original bill by introducing the following amendments, which were eventually adopted: (1) DREAM Act beneficiaries would be ineligible for federal aid grants, including Pell grants; (2) community service would not be accepted as an alternative to higher education or military service in order to satisfy the bill's requirements for removing conditional status; and (3) all beneficiaries would have to register in the Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), a database that tracks foreign students on temporary visas in the United States. They also modified the "grandfather clause" provision so that beneficiaries who already have completed the education or military service requirement prior to the bill's enactment would still have to wait three years in conditional resident status before qualifying for full permanent resident status.

Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-TN) has not yet scheduled the DREAM Act for full consideration on the Senate floor. The New York State DREAM Act task force is working with the national United We DREAM campaign in hopes of strengthening the bill by maintaining beneficiaries' eligibility for federal aid and removing the SEVIS database registration requirement. (See Action Box for details on what you can do to help.) For more information, contact Minerva at ext. 238.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Legislation Would Provide Tax Credit to Small Homeowners Maintaining Affordable Housing Stock

The Community Stability Small-Homeowner Tax Credit (CSTC), if enacted, would address the crisis of tenant displacement facing many communities by stabilizing long-term tenants in apartments where rising rents threaten to outpace tenants' ability to afford them. The program would offer property tax abatement to owners of small (1 to 5 unit) unregulated buildings who rent apartments to tenants below the market rate. The CSTC coalition has garnered strong bi-partisan support at the state and city levels.

Many low-income immigrants, including seniors, who live in neighborhoods with small homes would

benefit greatly from the passage of this legislation. A coalition of groups, which the NYIC has recently joined, has been working successfully to move this new and innovative housing affordability program forward.

Legislation to create the program was introduced in the New York State Assembly and the State Senate in January 2003 (A1841 and S196, respectively). The next step will be to urge the City Council to pass a resolution supporting the program before advocacy work at the state level intensifies. If you are not already an endorser, the NYIC encourages your group to strengthen the immigrant voice on the issue of preserving affordable housing. For additional information, please go to www.communitystability.org or contact Alissa Wise of the Fifth Avenue Committee at lwise@fifthave.org. This is a great opportunity for immigrant community organizations to demonstrate their support for a thoughtful and practical affordable housing preservation program that benefits low-income families and homeowners struggling to keep rents affordable.

On a related note, the NYIC recently launched an Immigrant Housing informational email list. To join, please email Benjamin Ross at bross@thenyic.org.



ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE RIGHT NOW TO HELP

PROTECT IMMIGRANTS' RIGHTS

1. **Urge Mayor Bloomberg to support Intro. 38A.** Join advocates for a press conference on the steps of City Hall on Thursday, November 6th, at 12 noon, to urge the Mayor to support Intro. 38A. Call the Mayor and fax him an organizational letter calling for his support. Tel. 212-788-3000; fax 212-791-9628.
2. **Protest Special Registration!** Join us on Monday, November 17th, for a protest outside 26 Federal Plaza in Manhattan against the re-registration of Arab and Muslim immigrants. For more information, contact Norman at ext. 235 or Karin at ext. 244.
3. **Call Senator Schumer to strengthen the DREAM Act.** Tell Senator Schumer to (1) urge Senate Majority Leader Frist to bring the DREAM Act to a floor vote, and (2) introduce amendments that restore beneficiaries' federal aid eligibility and remove the SEVIS registration requirement. Capitol switchboard: 202-224-3121.
4. **Call your City Council member to support a resolution in support of New York State's affordable housing tax credit proposal.** City Council operator: 212-788-7100. For more information, please go to www.communitystability.org or contact Alissa Wise of the Fifth Avenue Committee at lwise@fifthave.org.

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