

NYIC IMMIGRATION NEWS

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

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MONDAY, MARCH 1ST, 11:30AM, 26 FEDERAL PLAZA – PROTEST IMMIGRATION FEE HIKES, BACKLOGS, AND HARDER NATZ EXAM! Let's give DHS a report card on its one-year anniversary – immigration services need to improve! Call Norman at ext. 235 for details.

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN CITY ADVOCACY DAY! This was the biggest City Advocacy Day yet, with some 500 marchers from dozens of organizations delivering key messages to the City and meeting with 30 Council members and city officials on immigrant issues.

JOIN US NOW FOR IMMIGRANTS DAY IN ALBANY ON TUESDAY, MARCH 16TH! Contact Minerva at ext. 238 or at mmoya@thenyic.org for more information.

LANGUAGE ACCESS

Language Barriers Found to Block School Involvement for Immigrant Parents

The NYIC and Advocates for Children (AFC), in collaboration with eight community-based organizations from the New York metropolitan area, recently released a report documenting significant and widespread barriers facing parents with limited English skills who want to be involved in their child's school and education. The report, entitled *Denied at the Door: Language Barriers Block Immigrant Parents from School Involvement*, discusses the findings of a survey of nearly 1,000 parents regarding access to oral interpretation and translated materials in the school system. The report documents the startling lack of access to school-related information for parents who are not proficient in English, and outlines numerous violations of federal, state, and city laws and regulations that mandate access to translated materials and oral interpretation at schools.

The survey found that 47% of the respondents reported that they "never" or "rarely" receive written information from the school, school district, or Department of Education translated into their native language. The majority (56%) reported that they "never" or "rarely" receive oral interpretation of school-related information in their native language.

Other survey findings underscored the troubling lack of access for immigrant parents:

- Of the 342 surveys that identified the student to be in an ESL class, bilingual education program or both, 34% reported that the parent had not received information regarding either program in his/her native language.

- 60% of the time when a parent with limited English proficiency attempted to contact his/her child's school, the school used only English in response.
- 26% of respondents reported that the parent has had to sign consent forms that were not in his/her native language, even though the parent did not understand what s/he was signing.
- Lack of language access prevents participation by parents with limited English proficiency in school activities and hurts their child's school experience. More than 75% of respondents said they would actively participate in school activities if language services were available.

The report recommends immediate creation and implementation of a comprehensive language access system that meets federal No Child Left Behind requirements, as well as city and state regulations. Specific recommendations include creation of centralized translation and interpretation units and signage in schools informing parents of their right to language assistance. The report can be found at www.advocatesforchildren.org. For more information, contact José at ext. 241.

WORKER RIGHTS

Senate & Assembly Introduce Minimum Wage Bills

With the introduction of the Assembly minimum wage bill on February 5th and the Senate bill on the 13th, the campaign to raise New York State's minimum wage from its current rate of \$5.15 an hour has kicked into high gear. **Assembly Bill A9710**, sponsored by Susan John, raises the minimum wage incrementally to \$7.10 by 2006. In addition, A9710 raises the minimum wage for tipped food service workers (currently \$3.30) to \$4.65 by 2006. In terms of strengthening enforcement of the minimum wage, A9710 allows third parties to file complaints on behalf of non-unionized workers and allows local governments to access employers' compliance history and use it in making decisions about licenses, contracts, and subsidies.

Meanwhile, **Senate Bill S3291B**, sponsored by Guy Velella, raises the minimum wage to \$7.25 by 2006 and establishes a commission to study indexing the minimum wage to the average weekly wage, but it does not include an increase for tipped workers or any enforcement provisions. The enforcement provision is a crucial component of any bill, because the increase will be less effective if the state fails to enforce it. The NYIC and campaign partners are looking to get additional

sponsors for the bills and to ultimately pass the bill this legislative session.

Last week, the campaign organized three accountability sessions to pressure Senators Olga Mendez, Kemp Hannon and Nick Spano to support the increase. Constituents shared personal stories about struggling to survive and provide for their families on the minimum wage. The NYIC and Jobs With Justice also are working on an initiative to solicit clergy members to endorse the campaign. Currently, almost 150 clergy groups have endorsed the campaign. The NYIC also has reached out to community groups to organize minimum-wage workers to write letters to Cardinal Egan asking him to push for the Catholic Church's support in the campaign.

Our goal is to pass the bill by mid-April, so we need your active participation during the next six weeks (see Action Box for details). For more information, visit www.515isnotenough.org or call Jackie V. at ext. 239.

CITY ISSUES

New Immigrant Opportunities Initiative Would Fund Critical ESL Classes and Legal Services

The Immigrant Opportunities Initiative is a funding proposal of \$5 million in the City Council that would fund programs in English language and civics classes, immigrant legal services, and immigrant worker legal services. This proposal, formerly known as the Immigrant Services Initiative (originally funded at \$2.5 million in FY2002), funds more than 50 community-based programs serving thousands of immigrant families throughout New York City.

This year, a coalition of immigrant groups and City Council members are calling for an expansion of the program to meet the increased demand for ESL and legal services and to add a new component that provides employment-related legal services to the millions of immigrant workers laboring in the City's economy. This new immigrant worker legal services component would fund not-for-profit legal services providers to help workers file wage-and-hour complaints, report health and safety violations, or access workers' compensation benefits.

Currently, there is no funding for the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative in the Mayor's Preliminary Budget. The NYIC and partners are working to ensure that \$5 million is included in the final budget for FY2005. To join the campaign or for more information, contact Minerva at ext. 238 or Jackie Vimo at ext. 239.

Taxi Workers Fighting for Livable Wage

In recent months, the New York Taxi Workers Alliance (NYTWA) has been working to negotiate a livable wage for New York's 40,000 yellow-cab drivers. New York City's taxi drivers work long hours in

dangerous conditions and average just \$6/hour for a 70-hour workweek. The basic fare structure for taxis has not changed since 1996, while the costs of living and operating a taxi in the City have risen dramatically.

In order to address the dire working conditions of our City's taxi workers, the NYIC is supporting NYTWA's proposals to increase the taxi metered fare to achieve a \$12/hour driver wage and to lower lease caps (the maximum amount owners can charge drivers to rent taxis). Profits from the fare increase must be split equitably between drivers and owners. Drivers begin their days at a negative of about \$130 (gas and lease) and do not receive benefits such as health insurance, pension, paid time off, overtime or unemployment insurance. Taxi garages assume very little overhead while failing to provide important benefits to drivers. Accordingly, drivers should be fairly compensated for assuming the majority of the costs of providing taxi services.

NYTWA and NYIC staff met with City Council members on City Advocacy Day to urge them to endorse the campaign demands. On Thursday, March 4th, the NYTWA will hold a press conference at City Hall to call on the City to provide livable wages for taxi workers. For more information, please contact Jackie Vimo at ext. 239 or at jvimo@thenyic.org.



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

- 1. Get involved in the minimum-wage campaign!** You can endorse the campaign by going to the website www.515isnotenough.org; join in flyering efforts every Tuesday at various locations throughout the state; participate in canvassing activities in the NYC metro area; write handwritten letters describing personal experiences of surviving on the minimum wage; and attend upcoming events throughout the state. To get involved, contact Jackie Vimo at ext. 239.
- 2. Help taxi workers win a livable wage.** Join the NYTWA at a press conference at City Hall on Thursday, March 4th (time t.b.a.) to support the taxi workers. For more information, call Jackie Vimo at ext. 239.
- 3. Fight for funding of the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative.** Call Mayor Bloomberg at 212-788-3000 and Speaker Miller at 212-788-7100, and urge them to fund the Initiative at \$5 million – we badly need more ESL and civics classes and immigrant legal services. Call Minerva at ext. 238 or Jackie V. at ext. 239 for more information.

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