

# NYIC IMMIGRATION NEWS

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

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## **THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN IMMIGRANTS'**

**DAY IN ALBANY!** This was the biggest Albany Day ever, with close to 700 participants coming up on 14 buses and meetings with 30 State Legislators and officials on immigrant issues. Our protest of the State's new driver's license suspension policy was reported in *The New York Times*, *Newsday*, *The Associated Press*, *Telemundo*, *Univision*, and the *Legislative Gazette*. Thanks for making this Albany Day a great success!

## **NEW YORK STATE**

### **DMV Verifying SSNs, Suspending Driver's Licenses**

The New York State Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) has sent out more than 112,000 letters threatening to suspend the driver's licenses of New Yorkers whose DMV records are missing Social Security numbers (SSNs) or whose SSNs on file with DMV do not match up with Social Security Administration records. The letters inform recipients that their licenses or state ID cards may be suspended if they do not contact DMV within 15 days of receiving the letter.

According to *The New York Times*, DMV Commissioner Raymond P. Martinez stated that DMV personnel are expected to use case-by-case discretion in prosecuting people who provided false SSNs and that those who produce fraudulent documents will be arrested and charged with a felony. He further stated that DMV would not notify immigration authorities unless the person had presented suspicious immigration documents that needed verification. He estimated that DMV would complete its check of 11 million records by the end of the year and that more than 150,000 licenses would likely be suspended in the end.

The NYIC and partner organizations strongly oppose DMV's new policy. It is clearly in the public's best interest for all New York State residents, irrespective of their immigration status, to have access to driver's licenses and state IDs. DMV's new policy makes it impossible for many immigrant New Yorkers to earn a living and carry out life's most basic activities, like traveling or taking their children to school or the hospital. Tens of thousands of immigrants who must drive to work could lose their jobs, causing major disruptions in local industries and thousands of workplaces around the state.

Restricting immigrants' access to driver's licenses also jeopardizes road safety by forcing people to drive without a license. Ensuring that all drivers are tested,

licensed, and able to obtain auto insurance and register their vehicles is a better way to protect the public safety and security of all New Yorkers. Denying licenses and state IDs to certain immigrants also impedes law enforcement and national security by forcing people underground and creating a class of people for whom there are no public records.

Many public officials, including President Bush, have acknowledged that granting legal status to undocumented immigrants and enabling them to come out of the shadows is good for national security. The DMV's new policy pushes New York State in completely the opposite and wrong direction.

The NYIC is calling on Governor Pataki to direct DMV Commissioner Martinez to immediately reverse DMV's suspension policy and to work with the State Legislature and immigrant community representatives to agree upon alternative forms of identification that will meet the security needs of New York State, while at the same time permitting all qualified New York residents, irrespective of immigration status, to have access to driver's licenses. The NYIC has convened a working group that will meet every Thursday at 3pm. For more information, contact Mark at ext. 231 or Ana Maria at ext. 233.

### **Report Shows Most Minimum Wage Workers Are Immigrants, Highlights Need for Wage Increase**

On March 25<sup>th</sup>, the NYIC held a press conference at City Hall to release a report jointly prepared with the Fiscal Policy Institute that looks at immigrant workers and the minimum wage in New York City. The report found that immigrants are disproportionately concentrated in minimum wage jobs – 66% of workers who would benefit from a minimum wage increase are immigrants, and immigrants are nearly *twice* as likely as native-born workers to be earning minimum wages. The NYIC and its partners in the *\$5.15 Is Not Enough* coalition are fighting for an increase in New York's minimum wage as an important first step in ensuring that the growing immigrant workforce is fairly compensated.

On March 1<sup>st</sup>, the Assembly passed a minimum wage bill, A.9710, which would raise New York's minimum wage to \$7.10 an hour (\$4.65 for tipped workers) and strengthen minimum wage enforcement. The Senate's amended version, S.3291-C, also raises the minimum wage to \$7.10 an hour, but it does not include the enforcement provisions and coverage for tipped workers found in the Assembly bill. Because the Senate has failed to call for a vote on minimum wage legislation in five years, the *\$5.15 Is Not Enough* coalition has been

organizing media events in recent weeks to pressure Senators to vote on and pass S.3291-C, which has 13 co-sponsors. On March 15<sup>th</sup>, for example, the NYIC and NY Jobs With Justice held a press event at Riverside Church in Manhattan where clergy leaders spoke about the moral imperative to raise the minimum wage.

Advocates had hoped to win a minimum wage increase before the Senate breaks on April 1<sup>st</sup>, but Senate Republicans have indicated that a vote probably will not happen until after the budget is passed. On April 1<sup>st</sup>, members of the Senate Democrats will try a “motion-to-petition” maneuver in an effort to bring attention to the Senate’s failure to vote on a minimum wage bill.

Although this will not result in the passage of a Senate bill, groups plan to use it as an opportunity to hold an event to focus media attention on the Senate’s inaction. The NYIC will continue to push for the passage of the Senate minimum wage increase this legislative session. For more information or to get involved, contact Jackie Vimo at ext. 239 or at [jvimo@thenyic.org](mailto:jvimo@thenyic.org).

## CIVIC PARTICIPATION

### **NYIC 2004 Voting & Organizing Campaign: “Immigrant Votes Making the Difference”**

As we approach this year’s crucial elections for the Presidency, Senate, and State Legislature, the NYIC is gearing up to ensure that immigrant voices and concerns are at the center of the political debate and that immigrant votes are mobilized for the upcoming elections. Through our 2004 Immigrant Voting & Organizing Campaign, entitled “Immigrant Votes Making the Difference,” the NYIC will be working with more than 20 community organizations to educate and mobilize at least 100,000 immigrant voters for the 2004 elections.

The “Immigrant Votes Making the Difference” campaign will focus on getting immigrant voters to pledge to cast an informed vote on Election Day 2004. Community partners have been signing on at different levels of sponsorship, ranging from mobilizing a minimum of 1,000 newcomer voters to mobilizing 15,000 or more immigrant voters. Pledge signers will be incorporated into partner organizations’ ongoing voter education and non-partisan Get-Out-the-Vote activities, which will include canvassing visits to potential voters in immigrant neighborhoods, operating phone banks to encourage immigrants to vote, leafleting immigrant neighborhoods with election and voting rights information, opinion polling of immigrant voters, and intensive voter education events. The NYIC and campaign co-sponsors also will be doing extensive media work and mobilization to capitalize on the Republican National Convention coming to New York City this fall. The campaign will be formally launched next month. To get involved, contact Suman at [sraghunathan@thenyic.org](mailto:sraghunathan@thenyic.org) or at ext. 236.

### **Help America Vote Act Update**

As a result of passage of the *Help America Vote Act* in 2002 and the ongoing process of implementing this law at the state level, first-time voters who registered by mail after January 1, 2003 are receiving notices from their local Board of Elections office asking for additional identification information. (Those who registered to vote in person after January 1, 2003 and whose forms were hand-delivered to the Board of Elections are not subject to this requirement.)

These new voters are being asked to provide their driver’s license numbers, non-driver ID numbers, or the last four digits of their Social Security numbers. If the person has none of the above, s/he can provide a copy of a current and valid photo ID, current utility bill, bank statement, government check or pay check, or other government document showing the person’s name and address.

First-time voters can respond to the Board of Elections request by mail or in person. Alternatively, they can present the requested information to poll workers when voting on Election Day and still cast their votes using a voting machine. First-time voters who do not have acceptable identification still have the right to vote at their polling site on affidavit (paper) ballots; their votes, however, will not be counted until their voter registration records have been verified against Board of Elections records. For more information, contact Suman at ext. 236 or at [sraghunathan@thenyic.org](mailto:sraghunathan@thenyic.org).



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

**1. Urge Governor Pataki and the DMV Commissioner to reverse DMV’s new driver’s license suspension policy!**

The State needs to make driver’s licenses and state IDs available to all qualified New Yorkers, irrespective of immigration status! Gov. Pataki: 518-474-1041. DMV Commissioner Martinez: 518-474-0841. For sample letters you can send to them, contact Ana Maria at ext. 233. Please also call your local members of the NYS Senate and Assembly and urge them to contact the Governor. NYS Senate: 518-455-2800. NYS Assembly: 518-455-4100.

**2. Get involved in the minimum wage campaign!** Contact Jackie Vimo at ext. 239 to get plugged in!

**3. Join the 2004 Immigrant Voting & Organizing Campaign!** Immigrant votes will make the difference this election year! To get involved, contact Suman at ext. 236 or at [sraghunathan@thenyic.org](mailto:sraghunathan@thenyic.org).

**The New York Immigration Coalition  
275 Seventh Avenue, 9<sup>th</sup> Floor, NY, NY 10001  
tel: (212) 627-2227 / fax: (212) 627-9314**

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