

# NYIC IMMIGRATION NEWS

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

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## CITY BUDGET

### **Speaker Miller Says, "Give Immigrants a Chance!" Backs \$5 Million Immigrant Program**

On June 4<sup>th</sup>, New York City Council Speaker Gifford Miller joined fellow Council members in announcing their support for the \$5 million Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI), a city program that would fund immigration and employment-related legal services for immigrants as well as ESL and civics classes. Close to 200 immigrant New Yorkers and their supporters joined Speaker Miller for the June 4<sup>th</sup> press conference on the steps of City Hall, chanting "Give immigrants a chance!" The \$5 million IOI was included in the City Council's response to the mayor's Preliminary Budget, but the mayor did not include the IOI in his Executive Budget that was released last April.

The mayor and the City Council currently are in budget negotiations that will decide whether or not the IOI will be included in next year's budget. In the next few days, the City Council needs to hear from supporters of the IOI to ensure that these important immigrant services are included in the final budget. For more information, call Minerva at ext. 238 or Jackie Vimo at ext. 239.

## HOUSING

### **Funding for Section 8 Vouchers Under Attack**

Section 8 rental assistance for low- and very-low-income households is facing major cuts. The Section 8 program provides direct payments of rent through Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) to landlords. The Bush administration's FY 2005 budget proposes to cut an estimated \$1.66 billion in Section 8 funding. This would effectively eliminate approximately 250,000 Section 8 vouchers currently in use and dramatically worsen an already unacceptable affordable-housing crisis. New York City alone stands to lose \$55 million in vouchers.

The Bush administration's proposal would shift funding to a dollar-based system in place of a unit-based system by block-granting monies to local PHAs. This would cap the cost to the federal government and shift responsibility for absorbing rent increases to local PHAs. Many low-income families would be cut off from assistance or suffer significant reductions in assistance as a result. In addition, under proposed programmatic changes, PHAs would no longer be required to commit 75 percent of their monies to households with incomes less than 30 percent of area median income. These

changes would reduce the overall pool of funding and the amount of assistance available to those most in need.

An April 2004 decision by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to alter its PHA reimbursement policy for FY 2004 further undermines cash-poor PHAs and mandates immediate and significant cuts in Section 8 vouchers. The new policy bases HUD payments on the cost of vouchers under lease as of August 1, 2003, adjusted for inflation, rather than actual current voucher costs.

Please call your House representative and Senators Clinton and Schumer, and urge them to push for full funding of the Section 8 voucher program in FY 2005. Contact Benjamin at [bross@thenyic.org](mailto:bross@thenyic.org) for more information.

## EDUCATION

### **Albany Proposes New School Funding Formulas**

Governor Pataki, the State Senate, and the Assembly recently announced their respective plans to revise the state's formula for allocating school funding. The state was ordered to do so after the New York Court of Appeals ruled in a lawsuit brought by the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) that the state was not meeting its constitutional obligation to provide New York City schoolchildren with a "sound basic education" and that the city's schools were being grossly under-funded.

While all three plans fall short of the \$9.5 billion in additional funding (phased in over four years) urged by CFE, the Assembly's plan comes closest, calling for \$6.1 billion in increased aid, including \$3.9 billion in state aid to New York City, and \$1.2 billion in city funds, all to be phased in over five years. The Assembly plan is the only one to set aside increased funds (\$94.25 million) specifically for English language learners.

As the July 30th deadline approaches for the state to devise a plan to satisfy the court order, officials in Albany need to agree on a plan to ensure that New York City students, including English language learners, get their fair share of state and city education funding. For more information, contact José at ext. 241.

### **Report Finds Parent Coordinators Lack Resources to Bridge Language Gap With Immigrant Parents**

Parental involvement is a key factor in a student's educational success, but such involvement is being denied to limited-English-proficient (LEP) parents, who make up nearly half the school parents in New York City, according to a report recently released by the NYIC and Advocates for Children. The report, entitled

*From Translation to Participation: A Survey of Parent Coordinators in New York City*, makes clear that parent coordinators alone are unable to meet the translation and interpretation needs of LEP parents and that a system for interpretation and translation needs to be implemented.

The report, based on a survey of parent coordinators at 111 schools, found that the language needs of LEP parents far exceed the language abilities of parent coordinators. Even though 66 percent reported they are bilingual, 63 percent of these bilingual parent coordinators work in schools where the number of languages spoken by LEP parents exceeds the parent coordinator's language capabilities; survey respondents identified a total of 24 languages spoken by LEP parents. The survey also found that 82 percent of parent coordinators had resorted to using other bilingual persons, including teachers, students, and security guards, as interpreters. Nearly 75 percent of parent coordinators believed that LEP parents would participate more in school activities if translation and interpretation were provided.

The Department of Education (DOE) recently took a positive first step to address these language barriers by creating the position of Director of Translation and Interpretation Services. More needs to be done, however. The report calls for the creation of centralized translation and interpretation units and signs in schools informing parents of their right to language assistance. The full report is available at [www.advocatesforchildren.org](http://www.advocatesforchildren.org). For more information, contact José at ext. 241.

## HEALTH CARE ACCESS

### **State Legislation Moves Forward to Ensure Language Assistance in Hospitals**

With evidence mounting that language barriers at hospitals throughout New York State are driving down the quality of care and endangering immigrant families, the NYC and its partners went to Albany on June 8<sup>th</sup> to call on the State Senate to immediately pass legislation to protect immigrant patients from needless harm.

Proposed legislation would set a basic standard – that hospitals ensure clear communication through language assistance – and provide hospitals with great flexibility to meet that standard. Hospitals would be responsible for documenting the languages spoken by patients, informing patients about availability of free language assistance, ensuring that workers who interpret have appropriate training and language skills, printing important hospital forms in the most common languages, and reporting on compliance with the basic standard.

The State Assembly already has passed legislation (A.5431-B), introduced by Adriano Espaillat and co-sponsored by Richard Gottfried. An identical bill has been introduced in the State Senate Health Committee (S.5161-B) by Olga Mendez and co-sponsored by Kemp Hannon, the committee chair, but the State Senate has

not brought the bill to a vote. At meetings with key State Senate Republicans following the June 8<sup>th</sup> press conference, several senators indicated for the first time that they would be willing to support the legislation.

The challenge now is to get Senator Hannon to push S.5161-B through his committee and onto the floor of the State Senate for a vote, over the opposition of the Greater New York Hospital Association. For this to happen, the bill needs the full support of Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno, who thus far has withheld support. For more information, contact Adam at ext. 222 or Su Yon at ext. 232.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### **Donations for Haitian and Dominican Flood Victims**

Donations for victims of the floods that devastated towns along the Haitian-Dominican border are being accepted by Alianza Dominicana in Washington Heights and Haitian Women for Haitian Refugees (HWHR) in Brooklyn, among others. Contact Alianza at 212-740-1960 regarding its relief fund or HWHR at 718-735-4660 for more information.



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

1. **Demand funding for the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative!** Call Mayor Bloomberg at 212-788-3000 and your Council member and Speaker Miller via the City Council switchboard at 212-788-7100, and urge them to “give immigrants a chance” by funding the \$5 million Immigrant Opportunities Initiative.
2. **Fight to preserve Section 8!** Call your House representative and Senators Clinton and Schumer – urge them to push for full funding of the Section 8 voucher program in FY 2005 and reject proposed programmatic changes. Capitol switchboard: 202-224-3121. Please also call Mayor Bloomberg (212-788-3000) and Governor Pataki (518-474-1041), because our city and state leaders need to pressure Congressional leaders to protect this critical affordable-housing program.
3. **Call for language access in hospitals!** Call your state senator with the following message: “Improving communication in hospitals is a matter of life or death for immigrant New Yorkers. Please support Senate bill 5161-B, and urge Senators Bruno and Hannon to bring it to a vote.” Please also contact Senators Bruno and Hannon directly to urge a vote. NYS Senate: 518-455-2800.

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