

CALIFORNIA IMMIGRANT WELFARE COLLABORATIVE
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CIWC Announces Legislative, Policy Goals for 2001–02

The California Immigrant Welfare Collaborative announced a slate of goals for the 2001–02 legislative season that aims to ensure immigrants' access to safety net programs. In its "Immigrant Rights Policy Agenda 2001," CIWC outlined the following five broad areas of concern:

Guaranteeing a safety net for all Californians. This year, CIWC will support efforts to maintain immigrants' eligibility for the California Food Assistance Program (CFAP) and the Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants (CAPI) without regard to their date of entry in the U.S. Qualified immigrants who entered the U.S. on or after the federal welfare law's Aug. 22, 1996, enactment date are due to have benefits terminated on Sept. 30, 2001. Assemblyperson Wilma Chan has introduced a bill—AB 989—that if enacted will establish permanent programs for eligible immigrants, regardless of their date of entry. Assemblyperson Gil Cedillo has agreed to be the bill's principal co-author. Working on AB 989's passage is critical, as Governor Gray Davis's recently submitted budget proposal does not include provisions extending post-Aug. 22, 1996, entrants' eligibility for these two vital programs.

Guaranteeing health care for all Californians. CIWC will work to enable uninsured, low-income parents of children covered by Healthy Families or Medi-Cal also to enroll in Healthy Families. California recently submitted to the federal government a waiver request to extend coverage to uninsured adult parents. The governor's budget includes funding for qualified immigrant parents regardless of their date of entry. In addition to supporting the state's waiver, CIWC will encourage California to streamline the application process for Medi-Cal and Healthy Families, eliminate the assets test, and provide continuous eligibility for parents. All of these changes will increase the enrollment of families in the Healthy Families and Medi-Cal program.

Guaranteeing equal access to services. In the area of guaranteeing equal access to services, CIWC will focus its efforts on ensuring language access and examining the implementation of a fingerprint imaging system. Under the Dymally-Alatorre Bilingual Act, state and local agencies are required to offer services in non-English languages when five percent or more of the population they serve speak a particular language. However, as shown

in a recent audit conducted by the State Auditor's office, many agencies have not complied (see "California Not Meeting the Needs of Limited English-Proficient Residents," CALIFORNIA UPDATE, Dec. 29, 1999, p. 1). CIWC will support SB 987, which was introduced by Senator Martha Escutia. If passed, it would

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Proposed Budget Offers Mixed Bag for Immigrants

Governor Gray Davis's proposed budget for 2001–02 offers a mix of good and bad tidings for California's low-income immigrant communities. On the bright side, it will expand Healthy Families eligibility to cover qualified immigrant parents without regard to their date of entry into the U.S. However, the budget would terminate certain immigrants' eligibility for two key safety net programs based on their date of entry. It will also continue funding a controversial fingerprint imaging system that many advocates believe discourages persons in need—especially immigrants—from applying for welfare and nutrition assistance.

The governor's budget proposal was officially released on Jan. 10, 2001. What follows is an overview of proposed funding amounts for programs affecting immigrants:

Healthy Families (\$733.1 million). This amount is slated to serve an estimated 561,000 children in 2001–02. As noted above, the budget also proposes an increase of \$205.1 million to extend coverage to uninsured, low-income parents of children covered by either Healthy Families or Medi-Cal. Parents must be either citizens or qualified immigrants. In the case of qualified immigrants, they will be eligible regardless of whether they entered the U.S. before or after the federal welfare law's Aug. 22, 1996, enactment date.

Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants (CAPI—\$97.6 million). If adopted in its present form, the proposed budget will not con-

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- National Immigration Law Center
- Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles
- Asian Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California
- Northern California Coalition for Immigrant Rights
- Services, Immigrant Rights, and Education Network

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ensure proper implementation and enforcement of the act's requirements.

CIWC will also monitor the cost-effectiveness of the State-wide Fingerprint Imaging System (SFIS). Under the SFIS, food stamp and CalWORKs applicants are required to be fingerprinted and photographed, even when they are not applying on their own behalf. The controversial program has been criticized by some observers as a burdensome, expensive way to deter welfare fraud (see "California Counties Begin Implementing Fingerprint Imaging: Lawsuit Filed Challenging Program's Scope," CALIFORNIA UPDATE, Aug. 31, 2000, p. 1). And, as many advocates have pointed out, its continued use likely discourages immigrant families from applying for the two critical programs.

Investing in California's future. CIWC will support efforts to pass AB 540. Introduced by Assemblyperson Marco Firebaugh,

AB 540 would allow California high school graduates to pay in-state tuition to attend public colleges and universities, regardless of their immigration status. Under current state law, these students are effectively locked out of the state's public higher educational system because they are charged significantly higher out-of-state tuition. On the issue of driver's licenses, CIWC will encourage the legislature to pass AB 60, which was introduced by Assemblyperson Cedillo. If passed, AB 60 will allow immigrants in the process of applying for lawful immigration status also to apply for a driver's license.

Maximizing California's share of federal dollars. CIWC will also participate in advocacy efforts at the federal level to restore benefits unfairly cut off from immigrants by the 1996 welfare law. In addition, the collaborative will advocate to allow greater numbers of longtime residents to apply for lawful permanent residence.

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continue benefits for most post-Aug. 22, 1996, entrants beyond Sept. 30, 2001.

California Food Assistance Program (CFAP – \$52.6 million). As with CAPI, the budget will not continue providing CFAP benefits to most post-Aug. 22, 1996, entrants beyond Sept. 30, 2001.

Language access. The proposed budget sets off \$585,000 to fund the State Personnel Board's continuing implementation of the Dymally-Alatorre Bilingual Services Act. The law requires state agencies to provide services in languages other than English when five percent or more of the population they serve speak a particular language. The State Personnel Board will also use the funds to monitor agencies' compliance with this law. The budget also proposes \$3.7 million to fund the increased use of court interpreters in trial court proceedings.

Statewide Fingerprint Imaging System (SFIS – \$12.2 million). Under SFIS, applicants for CalWORKs and food stamps, including those who are not seeking benefits on their own behalf, are required to be fingerprinted and photographed. As noted above, many antipoverty and immigrants' rights advocates worry that the SFIS requirements discourage eligible individuals from applying for these two critical safety-net programs. Nonetheless, the governor's proposed budget continues SFIS funding. The \$12.2 million slated for 2001–02 reflects a projected reduction of \$6.1 million from last year's levels, due to completion of the system's implementation stages.

Healthy Families outreach (\$42.2 million). This amount represents an increase of \$7.9 million from last year's levels. The expansion of outreach efforts through schools and school-affiliated programs is slated to receive \$6 million, and \$1 million has been earmarked to implement the expansion of eligibility for adults.

Medi-Cal simplification (\$142.1 million). In addition to the \$269.5 million to provide 12 months of continuous Medi-Cal coverage for children 19 and younger, the budget sets off \$142.1 to fund efforts to simplify the program's administration. Such efforts will focus on the elimination of the burdensome quarterly status report, as well as other measures designed to broaden access to the program.

Migrant Worker Housing (\$9.6 million). The amount provides funding for the Office of Migrant Services to reconstruct or repair migrant farm worker housing centers. It will also pay for ongoing housing center operations and replacement of playground equipment.

Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT – \$7.7 million). Representing an increase of \$1.5 million over last year's budget, the amount will be used to begin project development and implementation of the EBT, which will use plastic cards similar to electronic debit cards to distribute welfare benefits. Federal law requires states to implement an EBT system in the food stamp program by Oct. 1, 2002, and counties will be given the option to use the system to deliver CalWORKs benefits.

The governor's proposed budget and other related documents can be found at the Dept. of Finance's web site at www.dof.ca.gov.