

CALIFORNIA IMMIGRANT WELFARE COLLABORATIVE
California Update

Volume 6

Issue 1

May 30, 2002

Governor's "May Revision" Slashes Health Care and Safety Net Programs for Low-Income Families

With California facing a staggering \$23.6 billion deficit—nearly twice the amount he estimated in January—Governor Gray Davis released, on May 14, 2002, the official revision to his proposed 2002–03 state budget. While the revised budget retains funding for critical services for immigrants, it maintains significant funding cuts for the Naturalization Services Program (NSP), reductions Davis had proposed in his original budget plan.

Naturalization Services Program. The NSP provides funding to local government agencies and community-based organizations to help lawful immigrants obtain U.S. citizenship. Since its inception in 1999, the program has served a total of 55,942 immigrants statewide. Of this total, more than 46,000 immigrants have filed citizenship applications, and 9,674 applicants have been assisted with advocacy and follow-up after their citizenship applications were filed.

The governor's budget revision maintains a reduction in funding for the NSP from the original current year budget of \$6.5 million to \$2 million in 2002–03. The cut comes despite increased interest in citizenship among immigrants and rising costs for them to file the required application. Recently, the citizenship application form increased from 4 to 10 pages and the Immigra-

Please see "May Revision," page 2, column 1

CIWC LAYS OUT POLICY AGENDA FOR 2002

Priorities Include Health Care, Language Access, Driver's Licenses, and TANF

The California Immigrant Welfare Collaborative's Immigrant Rights State Policy Agenda for 2002 includes several priorities for immigrant and refugee communities across California. Key issues include the protection of health care and other safety net programs for immigrants and low-income families; ensuring equal access to services and information for limited English-proficient (LEP) residents; and allowing immigrants to apply for driver's licenses regardless of immigration status. CIWC's agenda also includes work on restoring benefits at the federal level.

The downturn in the economy and the unprecedented budget deficit in California pose a threat to the state's safety net programs at a time when they are needed most. CIWC's agenda addresses these issues and others of concern to immigrants and refugees in California.

In the health care and social services arena, the CIWC Policy Agenda will focus on maintaining and expanding Medi-Cal and Healthy Families for immigrants and low-income families. Of particular concern is the expansion of the Medi-Cal 1931(b) program for new applicants, which the governor has proposed to

Please see "Policy Agenda," page 2, column 1

Immigrant Day in Sacramento Draws More Than 650 Activists

PARTICIPANTS PROTEST GOVERNOR'S PROPOSED CUTS TO SAFETY NET PROGRAMS

Despite heavy rain, wind, and hail, more than 650 people converged on the state capitol May 20, 2002, to call on lawmakers to "Save the Safety Net for Children and Families." This year's event protested certain cuts proposed by the governor in the May revision to his 2002–03 budget (see "Governor's 'May Revision' Slashes Health Care and Safety Net Programs for Low-Income Families," above).

"This is precisely the time California needs to strengthen and maintain a safety net for those who need it most—children, working families, seniors, and persons with disabilities—instead of slashing funding for these critical programs," said Rini Chakraborty, director of the California Immigrant Welfare

Please see "Immigrant Day," page 3, column 1

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May Revision (continued from page 1)

tion and Naturalization Service processing fee rose to \$310 per applicant. Without assistance, many immigrants will be unable to afford applying to become citizens or be too discouraged to pursue the application process.

Some of California's most vulnerable residents depend on the state's citizenship assistance program. Most clients of the NSP are low-income seniors who speak little English, and many of them find the naturalization process stressful at best. Some find it overwhelming. Some have even become victims of citizenship scams. As reported by the *San Jose Mercury News*, 25 immigrants were recently charged \$25,000 each to participate in a phony citizenship program and ceremony. By continuing to fully fund the NSP, California will help immigrants to assume both the benefits and responsibilities of citizenship, as well as protect them from exploitation.

Health Programs. Despite the pressing need to maintain a safety net during the current economic downturn, the governor's revised budget postpones until 2003 the expansion of the Healthy Families program to cover uninsured, low-income parents of children enrolled in Healthy Families or Medi-Cal. The May revision rescinds the Medi-Cal 1931(b) expansion and reinstates quarterly reporting in Medi-Cal (see "CIWC Lays Out Policy Agenda for 2002," p. 1). Governor Davis also proposes to delay until the year 2005 implementation of "express lane" eligibility, which was created to facilitate enrollment into Medi-Cal and Healthy Families for children who already receive food stamps or school lunches. The delay of express lane eligibility, as well as the elimination of funds for Healthy Families and Medi-Cal outreach, came as a shock to schools and local agencies poised to begin implementing the programs this summer.

The governor's May revision includes funding for the Child Health and Disability Prevention (CHDP) program. The CHDP program provides immunizations and health assessments for the early detection and prevention of diseases and disabilities for children, regardless of immigration status. (see "CIWC Lays Out Policy Agenda for 2002," p. 1).

Social Services. The governor's budget proposal suspends pass-through of the federal cost of living adjustment (COLA) for recipients of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and the State Supplementary Payment (SSP). Since the governor is proposing to suspend the state and federal COLAs, the monthly grant levels under the Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants (CAPI) currently in effect would remain frozen through 2003. In addition, the governor's proposal continues suspension of the COLA for CalWORKs participants.

In his revised budget proposal, the governor restores \$92.2 million to continue providing food stamps under the California Food Assistance Program (CFAP) to "qualified" immigrants who remain ineligible for federal food stamps. Although recent legislation signed by President Bush restores food stamps to a large number of qualified immigrants (see "President Bush Signs Farm Bill; Food Stamp Eligibility Restored for Large Numbers of Immigrants," IMMIGRANTS RIGHTS UPDATE, May 30, 2002, p. 9), only a fraction of CFAP recipients will have access to federal food stamps by October 2002; 75 percent of them will be eligible for federal food stamps by April 2003.

In a positive note regarding the state's food stamp program, in his budget proposal the governor adopts quarterly instead of monthly reporting provisions. The change will result in annual savings of \$16.9 million, beginning in 2003-04.

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Policy Agenda (continued from page 1)

rescind. This program would allow two-parent families with incomes at or below 100 percent of the poverty level to receive full-scope Medi-Cal without paying a share-of-cost. The governor also proposed to reinstate quarterly status reporting in Medi-Cal, which could threaten health coverage for more than 200,000 adults, according to the governor's own estimates.

As part of its 2002 agenda, CIWC will continue to advocate for the Child Health and Disability Prevention (CHDP) program. This program was eliminated in the governor's original 2002-03 budget proposal but, in a significant victory for health care and immigrant rights advocates, it was restored in the his May revision after a storm of protest. The administration has instructed the California Dept. of Health Services to preserve the existing CHDP program and design an internet-based enrollment system to be implemented in 2003.

CIWC is also pressing for the passage of legislation that would ensure the proper implementation and enforcement of the Dymally-Alatorre Bilingual Services Act. Since 1973, the act has required state and local agencies to offer their services in languages other than English when there is a significant need. In

December 2001, the State Personnel Board found that none of the 20 agencies it reviewed was in compliance with the act.

CIWC's legislative agenda supports AB 60 (Cedillo) as a first step toward allowing immigrants to apply for driver's licenses regardless of immigration status. This bill would allow immigrants who are applying for lawful immigration status to apply for a license. The legislation is currently under debate and faces challenges from advocates of stringent requirements, including the use of biometrics and criminal background checks of applicants. CIWC's goal is to protect the basic rights of immigrants as the debate unfolds.

CIWC also calls for the full restoration of funds to the state Naturalization Services Program (NSP), which, since its inception, has helped more than 50,000 immigrants in California become naturalized citizens. In his revised state budget, the governor proposes a drastic cut to this program for the next fiscal year. Advocates say increased citizenship application costs and an increase in interest in citizenship among immigrants will make the NSP even more critical in the coming year.

This year, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

Please see "Policy Agenda," page 3, column 2

Immigrant Day (continued from page 1)

Collaborative.

Immigrants, low-income families, and advocates boarded buses from various cities across California, including Los Angeles, Oakland, San Francisco and San Jose, to meet with their elected representatives. For some, it was their first opportunity to meet with lawmakers. In their meetings, participants urged legislators to preserve programs that are critical to children and families.

The platform for the day included calls to

- restore funding for the Naturalization Services Program;
- preserve Child Health and Disability Prevention (CHDP);
- restore Medi-Cal 1931(b) funding and rescind quarterly status reporting;
- restore CalWORKS and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) cost of living adjustments (COLAs); and
- restore funding for child care, adult education, and training for CalWORKS participants.

The lobby day began with a legislative briefing where members of the communities most affected by the budget cuts as well as advocates addressed the principal agenda items for the day.

David Carroll of the California Budget Project offered the standing room-only crowd an overview of the governor's proposed state budget. Casey McKeever of the Western Center on Law and Poverty discussed the long-term impact of the suspension of COLAs.

The audience was roused to chants of "*Si se puede!*" ("Yes, it can be done!") by Filipino American Services representative and World War II veteran Peping Baclig, who made an impassioned call for the governor to protect the state's safety net for the poor. Later in the program other speakers, including Vivian

Huang of the California Primary Care Association, Rini Chakraborty of CIWC, Kyong Duk of the Korean Resource Center, and Leilani Luia, a board member of Lifetime and recipient of numerous community service awards, talked about cuts to health care, programs that target immigrants, and vital education and training programs.

The legislative briefing, which was well-attended by community members and the media, was followed by visits to legislators. Long lines formed outside the capitol as delegations entered to see their representatives. A noontime rally had to be cancelled because of a hailstorm, but participants boarded buses in good spirits for the trip home.

The event was organized by the National Campaign for Jobs and Income Support and CIWC. Other participants and supporters included the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), the Coalition for Ethical Welfare Reform (CEWR), the Korean Resource Center, Families in Good Health, Lifetime, and Parent Voices.

Policy Agenda (continued from page 2)

(TANF) program must be reauthorized by Congress. The TANF reauthorization presents a unique opportunity to revisit the law's basic provisions. In particular, CIWC members will press for a restoration of federal health care programs for immigrants as well as measures that will make the TANF program more responsive to LEP individuals, such as the inclusion of English language classes as a work activity.

For a copy of CIWC's State Policy Agenda 2002, please contact CIWC's Sacramento office at 916-448-6762

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