

CALIFORNIA IMMIGRANT WELFARE COLLABORATIVE  
**California Update**

Volume 7

Issue 1

March 14, 2003

## *CIWC Announces Its Policy Agenda for 2003*

*The California Immigrant Welfare Collaborative has released its Immigrant Rights State Policy Agenda for 2003. The agenda focuses on a renewed effort to broaden access to driver's licenses and the defense of state health and welfare programs that serve low-income immigrants and their families.*

In addition to focusing on driver's licenses and their call to "save the safety net" in California, CIWC partners have also targeted several other issues for state advocacy and community-based campaigns. These include job training for individuals about to reach the lifetime limit on welfare eligibility mandated by the 1996 welfare law, defense of the Naturalization Services Program, and a call for the elimination of the Statewide Fingerprint Imaging System program. Beyond issues in California, CIWC will also join forces with immigrant and welfare rights advocates nationwide to ensure that the reauthorization of the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program restores benefits to immigrants and expands services for individuals who are limited English-proficient.

*Save the Safety Net.* On Jan. 10, 2003, with the state facing an unprecedented \$34.6 billion deficit, Governor Gray Davis officially released his proposed 2003-04 budget. Nearly 60 percent of the fiscal savings proposed by the budget is slated to be achieved through program reductions alone, including draconian cuts to programs that serve low-income working families, such as Medi-Cal, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), CalWORKs, and citizenship services. In addition, Davis proposed a sweeping overhaul of numerous health and social services programs under an \$8.2 billion "realignment" plan.

The governor's realignment proposal would shift the responsibility and costs associated with administering numerous health and human services programs from the state to the local level, for a projected savings of \$8.2 billion. Funding for local counties to maintain these programs would be provided by three separate tax increases, totaling \$8.3 billion in revenues in 2003-04. They are a one-cent sales tax increase, a personal income tax increase for upper-income taxpayers, and an excise tax increase of \$1.10 on cigarettes and tobacco products.

Among many programs to be shifted to local governments under the governor's proposal are the California Food Assistance Program (CFAP), the Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants (CAPI), food stamp administration, CalWORKs single allocation (employment services and administration), and Expanded Access to Primary Care (EAPC).

While realignment may be appropriate in certain instances, CIWC is concerned about the impact it may have on CFAP and CAPI. CFAP provides food stamps to working families who are no longer eligible for federal food stamps, and CAPI provides subsistence aid to seniors and persons with disabilities who are no longer eligible for SSI benefits. According to the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO), Governor Davis proposes to give counties full discretion in operating these programs—including the option of eliminating them. In its publication "2003-2004 Budget: Perspectives and Issues," the LAO states that CFAP and CAPI are inappropriate for realignment due to the state's interest in maintaining statewide uniformity in benefit levels for these programs in all 58 counties. CIWC believes that both programs should be maintained, regardless of realignment.

Now more than ever California must maintain essential services to assist low-income working families who are already struggling and bearing the brunt of a slowing economy. Despite the gravity of the state's economic condition, CIWC believes that California cannot afford to make shortsighted cuts to critical, life-saving programs that would jeopardize the health and well-being of thousands of Californians and may cost the state more in the long run.

*Public Safety: Allow All California Residents to Obtain a Driver's License, Regardless of Immigration Status.* Current law makes thousands of state residents ineligible for a driver's license solely due to their immigration status or inability to provide a Social Security number. A license is key to the survival of any worker who lives, pays taxes, and raises a family in California. Unlicensed, untrained, and uninsured drivers jeopardize public safety and raise insurance and other transportation-related costs for everyone. A driver's license bill (AB 60) won support from legislators last year and reached the governor's desk, but he vetoed it, citing security concerns. Another driver's license bill, SB 60 (Cedillo), is due to be introduced mid-March 2003.

*Promoting Self-Sufficiency: Create Pilot Project to Provide Effective Education and Job Training for Low-Wage Immigrant Workers.* CIWC is supporting SB 1001 (Escutia), which would create a

*Continued on page 2*

### **THE CALIFORNIA IMMIGRANT WELFARE COLLABORATIVE IS A JOINT PROJECT OF**

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

COLLABORATIVE SACRAMENTO OFFICE: 926 "J" Street, Suite 701, Sacramento, CA 95814 • 916.448.6762 • fax 916.448.6774

TO RECEIVE "CALIFORNIA UPDATE" AND OTHER COLLABORATIVE MATERIALS, REQUEST "CIWC SIGN-UP" FROM  
National Immigration Law Center, 3435 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 2850, Los Angeles, CA 90010 • 213.639.3900 • fax 213.639.3911

*Continued from page 1*

pilot project to provide effective education and job training programs, including English language instruction, to low-wage workers. Initially, the program would focus on workers who are approaching or have reached their lifetime limit on CalWORKs. A large number of adults reaching their CalWORKs time limits are limited English-proficient and are from two-parent households where at least one parent works full time and fulfills the state's participation requirements. Lack of industry-specific and culturally appropriate job training has steered these workers into low-wage jobs with little opportunity for advancement. As a result, many have had to rely on cash assistance to supplement their earnings. CIWC believes that California's economy will grow stronger with every dollar invested in helping low-wage workers gain skills, find better jobs, and become self-sufficient.

*End Burdensome Barriers to State Benefits Programs: Eliminate the Statewide Fingerprint Imaging System (SFIS).* The SFIS program requires that all applicants for CalWORKs or food stamp benefits, including parents who are applying only for their children, submit photos and fingerprints. This unnecessary application requirement imposes an additional barrier on immigrants already reluctant to seek essential benefits. Although the purpose of SFIS was fraud reduction, the California State Auditor/Bureau of State Audits found in Jan. 2003 that "most of the matches that SFIS identified have turned out to be administrative errors made by county staff, and the level of detected duplicate aid fraud has been small." By eliminating this wasteful

program, California could save approximately \$11.4 million per year. CIWC supports the passage of AB 231 (Steinberg), which, among its other provisions, would eliminate the SFIS.

*Promote Civic Participation: Maintain the Naturalization Service Program (NSP).* The NSP has helped thousands of immigrants in California, particularly seniors, to become U.S. citizens. Governor Davis has proposed to eliminate the NSP as of July 2003. This shortsighted cut fails to recognize the long-term benefits that the NSP contributes to California, since immigrants who naturalize become eligible to vote, have increased access to federal employment, and are able to participate fully in civic life.

*Ensure the Healthy Development of All Children.* CIWC believes that the state should explore the feasibility of extending health care coverage to all children, regardless of immigration status. Several counties, including Santa Clara, San Francisco, and San Mateo, already offer low-cost, comprehensive health coverage to all children. California should follow their example and provide quality, accessible health care to all children.

*Maximize Federal Dollars for California:* CIWC believes that federally funded health care and other benefits should be restored to immigrants. As Congress reconsiders the discriminatory measures enacted under the 1996 welfare law, it will have the opportunity to undo some of that legislation's most restrictive provisions. Along with other immigrant and welfare rights advocates from across the country, CIWC will work to persuade Congress to adopt a TANF reauthorization measure that provides for the broadest eligibility for immigrants in need.

---

**NATIONAL IMMIGRATION LAW CENTER**  
3435 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 2850  
Los Angeles, CA 90010

*Address correction requested*