

CALIFORNIA IMMIGRANT WELFARE COLLABORATIVE
California Update

Volume 5

Issue 3

May 14, 2001

IMMIGRANT DAY 2001: "IMMIGRANTS WORK FOR CALIFORNIA"

Immigrant Communities Push for Permanent Safety Net Programs; Press Lawmakers on Higher Ed, Driver's Licenses, Barriers to Access

More than 900 immigrant community members and advocates gathered in Sacramento on May 7, 2001, to participate in the sixth Immigrant Day event. Drawn from cities throughout California, Immigrant Day participants traveled to the state capital from Fresno, San Jose, and faraway Los Angeles and San Diego. Participants urged Governor Gray Davis and lawmakers to enact legislative proposals critical to the health and well-being of working immigrant families, seniors, and persons with disabilities. The theme of this year's event, "Immigrants Work for California," highlighted the significant contributions immigrants make to the communities in which they live.

"Where would California be without the hard work and dedication of immigrant communities?" asked Rini Chakraborty, policy advocate with the California Immigrant Welfare Collaborative, principal organizer of the event. "It's time that California gives credit where credit is due."

The day led off with a press conference that briefed the media on legislative proposals identified as important to low-income immigrants. Speakers included Assemblymember Wilma Chan, author of AB 989. The bill would allow immigrants who entered the United States on or after Aug. 22, 1996, to receive California Food Assistance Program (CFAP) and Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants (CAPI) benefits beyond Sept. 30, 2001. According to Chan, "These programs are vital to the immigrant community because they provide basic aid to an extremely vulnerable population of legal residents."

A broad coalition of groups, including children's rights advocates, food banks, faith-based groups, and local government, have expressed their support for AB 989. Suzan Bateson, executive director of the Alameda County Food Bank, said, "After the 1996 federal welfare law was implemented, we began to see more working poor families who are clearly running out of resources. They work at one or two minimum wage jobs and simply cannot make ends meet. The CFAP program is absolutely essential for these families."

The press event also featured moving testimony by Cornelio Carranza, a farm worker from the San Joaquin Valley whose daughter has Down's Syndrome. If the legislation introduced by Chan

is not passed, Carranza's daughter will lose her CAPI benefits later this year.

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IMMIGRANTS' RIGHTS

State Policy Agenda 2001

Immigrant Day participants met with elected officials to express support for the following bills:

- **AB 989 (Chan and Cedillo)** would delete sunset dates and maintain the California Food Assistance Program (CFAP) and Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants (CAPI) for eligible immigrants, regardless of their date of entry into the United States. Without this legislation, immigrants who entered the U.S. on or after Aug. 22, 1996, will lose these essential benefits on Sept. 30, 2001.
- **SB 833 and SB 402 (Ortiz)**. SB 833 would enhance efforts to enroll working families in Medi-Cal by streamlining the application process, eliminating the assets test, and providing continuing eligibility for parents. SB 402 would provide no-cost Medi-Cal and Healthy Families coverage to 19 and 20 year old individuals.
- **SB 987 (Escutia)** would ensure proper implementation and enforcement of the Dymally-Alatorre Bilingual Services Act. Since its passage in 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 1999 the State Bureau of Audits found that only two of the ten agencies it reviewed were aware of their responsibility to translate materials. Despite existing state law, many Californians do not receive information and services in a language that they understand.
- **AB 540 (Firebaugh)** would allow California high school graduates to pay in-state tuition and qualify for financial assistance to attend public colleges and universities, regardless of their immigration status.
- **AB 60 (Cedillo)** would allow immigrants who are applying for a lawful immigration status to apply for a driver's license.

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As with previous Immigrant Days, this year's event afforded participants the chance to meet with their elected representatives to discuss their concerns. In addition to proposals concerning eligibility for safety net programs, Immigrant Day attendees expressed support for bills addressing higher education benefits, driver's licenses, and the provision of linguistically appropriate services.

Introduced by Assemblymember Marco Firebaugh, AB 540 would allow California high school graduates to pay in-state tuition and qualify for financial assistance to attend public colleges and universities, regardless of their immigration status. AB 60, authored by Assemblymember Gil Cedillo, would allow immigrants applying for a lawful immigration status to apply for a driver's license. SB 987, which was introduced by Senator Martha Escutia, would ensure proper implementation and enforcement of the Dymally-Alatorre Bilingual Service Act. Since its passage in 1973, the act has required state and local agencies to offer their services in languages other than English when there is significant need. However, a 1999 State Bureau of Audits report found that only 20 percent of the agencies it reviewed had knowledge of the act's requirements.

Immigrant Day participants also expressed concern about immigrants' access to adequate health care and the state's use of a fingerprint imaging system in administering food stamp and welfare benefits. They encouraged elected officials to allow uninsured, low-income parents whose children are covered by either Healthy Families or Medi-Cal to enroll in Healthy Families, regardless of their date of entry into the U.S. SB 833, which was introduced by Senator Deborah Ortiz, would enhance efforts to enroll working families in Medi-Cal by streamlining the application process, eliminating the assets test, and providing continuous eligibility for parents. SB 402, also introduced by Ortiz, would provide no-cost Medi-Cal and Healthy Families coverage to 19 and 20 year-olds.

Legislators were also asked to examine the cost effectiveness of the State Fingerprint Imaging System (SFIS). Under SFIS, applicants for cash and nutrition assistance must comply with burdensome requirements. Many advocates feel that the system, which requires even nonapplicant members of households to be fingerprinted, likely deters eligible immigrants from applying for benefits.

"Immigrant Day represents a coming together of diverse immigrant communities across this state, many of whom have never been to Sacramento or met with their representatives until to-

day," said Ed Dunn with the Interfaith Coalition for Immigrant Rights, one of the event's organizers.

Immigrant Day 2001 concluded with a rally that took place on the steps of the capitol building. Speakers urged legislators and the governor to enact policies that recognize the important contributions immigrants make to the state's prosperity.

Long-Time Californian Depends on CAPI for Daughter's Support ***FAMILY FACES LOSS OF BENEFITS***

Cornelio Carranza, a featured speaker during the press conference that opened this year's Immigrant Day, has lived and worked in California since 1981. Now 66 years old, Carranza has performed backbreaking work all his life, toiling as a fruit picker in packing plants and other agriculture industry-related work. In 1986 he obtained lawful permanent resident status under the Immigration Reform and Control Act's amnesty program. A proud husband and father, Carranza faces the possibility that the last of his children, an adolescent daughter born with Down's Syndrome, will lose her cash assistance benefits.

Under current law, low-income immigrants who entered the United States on or after the date the federal welfare law passed will lose their Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants (CAPI) benefits on Sept. 30, 2001. Carranza petitioned for his wife and daughter but they did not join him until 1998.

Prior to his daughter's receipt of CAPI assistance, the family lived in a one room trailer and slept on the floor. The CAPI benefits helped Carranza pay for his daughter's basic necessities—a bed, clothing, and food. Continuing CAPI assistance will also enable her to receive much-needed dental work.

"I came to Sacramento for my daughter because she can't come herself to ask for the program to be continued," Carranza said. "And I know there are other girls like her and elderly people who can't be here on their own behalf."

Though the family's CAPI benefit is modest (the daughter receives \$408 per month), its loss would be devastating for the Carranzas. He continued, "I have always wanted my daughter to have her own financial support because I don't know what will happen to her once my wife and I are gone."