

CALIFORNIA IMMIGRANT WELFARE COLLABORATIVE
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Governor Davis Signs Healthy Families Bill for Immigrant Kids, but Vetoes Driver's License and Higher Education Bills

In response to significant pressure from immigrants and their allies, Governor Gray Davis signed AB 2415, repealing the time limit on coverage under the Healthy Families program for immigrants who entered the U.S. on or after Aug. 22, 1996. While immigrant communities welcomed news of the bill's passage, their enthusiasm was muted by the governor's veto of two other bills affecting immigrants. Davis declined to sign legislation that would have eased driver's license application requirements and made attending the state's community colleges and public universities more affordable for some California high school graduates.

Before Davis signed AB 2415 (Migden), "qualified" immigrants who entered the U.S. on or after the date the federal welfare law passed (Aug. 22, 1996) were eligible for Healthy Families coverage for a limited period of time. Under the state budget for fiscal year 2000-01 that was adopted this past summer, post-Aug. 22,

1996, entrants were due to receive only 12 months of coverage if they enrolled by June 30, 2001. Similarly, post-Aug. 22, 1996, entrants who enrolled in the program by June 30, 2000, were slated to receive only another 12 months of coverage upon re-determination of their eligibility. With the passage of AB 2415, all

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Santa Clara County Proposes to Provide Health Coverage to All Its Uninsured Children

Santa Clara County has proposed an initiative that if implemented will provide health coverage to all the uninsured children residing within its limits. Using funds from the tobacco settlement and other sources, the Children's Health Initiative would provide some form of health care to the county's nearly 70,000 uninsured children. The program could be in place as early as next January 2001.

Under the initiative, families eligible for Medi-Cal or Healthy Families would be directed into one of those programs. The initiative will also provide coverage to families ineligible for both programs due either to exceeding income eligibility requirements (families earning up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level would be covered) or their immigration status. Families benefiting from this third insurance option would receive primary and specialty care and coverage for vision and dental care. Monthly premiums for participation in this plan are projected to range from zero to \$24.

The Children's Health Initiative would also establish a "hardship fund" to subsidize premiums and co-payments for Healthy Families coverage. And, by providing a temporary, one-month eligibility period for any child who "appears to be eligible" for any of the three health programs, the initiative would ensure that children in urgent need of care will receive it immediately rather than having to wait for paperwork to be processed.

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• **Advocacy forums slated for December (p. 2)**

CalKids Resumes Enrollment in Selected Counties

California Kids (or CalKids), a nonprofit health insurance program for children, has reopened enrollment in six counties: Los Angeles, Marin, Monterey, Orange, Solano, and Sonoma. Due to the large demand, the program was forced to close temporarily in June of this year. CalKids provides preventive and primary health care, and dental and vision care to children who are ineligible for full-scope Medi-Cal and Healthy Families. All children regardless of immigration status may apply for coverage. Children ages 2 through 18 are eligible if their family's income is below 250 percent of the federal poverty level. There is a minimal application fee, and co-payments of \$5 to \$15 depending on the service. Families with incomes between 200 and 250 percent of poverty also must pay a modest monthly fee.

CalKids can be used to supplement other medical coverage. For example, children enrolled in emergency Medi-Cal or California Children's Services can rely on CalKids for basic outpatient services. Children who have private insurance with a high deductible may also be eligible for the program. CalKids does not

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qualified immigrants, regardless of their date of entry, can enroll in Healthy Families without the threat of losing coverage.

The governor's decision to make Healthy Families benefits available to all qualified immigrants represented the culmination of several months of intensive advocacy efforts by immigrants and immigrants' rights advocates. A broad alliance of health care providers, county supervisors, and labor and children's advocates wrote letters as well as participated in "call-in" days and legislative visits. Immigrant community members and their allies provided testimonies from immigrants at risk and disseminated those accounts to the media.

Although such efforts prompted Davis to sign AB 2415, he chose to return AB 1463 (Cedillo) and AB 1197 (Firebaugh) to the legislature without his signature. AB 1463 would have repealed the Social Security number requirement in applications for driver's licenses and state identification cards. In addition, the bill would have allowed individuals in the process of applying for lawful immigration status to obtain driver's licenses or ID cards. AB 1197 would have allowed students who are applying for lawful immigration status to pay in-state tuition to attend California community colleges or public universities, if they meet other requirements.

Governor Davis announced these vetoes at the same time that he signed AB 2415. In a press release, Davis echoed the rhetoric of his predecessor: "It is important to note that we are

providing assistance to legal, not illegal immigrants who are fully legitimate residents in California. We are resolved to continue to crack down on illegal immigration. We are equally resolved, however, to provide health coverage to the families of legal, working immigrants." These false divisions ignore the fact that immigrant families often include both U.S. citizens and persons with different immigration statuses.

Immigrants and immigrants' rights advocates plan to press forward on driver's licenses and in-state tuition during next year's legislative season.

CIWC to Hold Advocacy Forums in Dec. 2000

The California Immigrant Welfare Collaborative will be conducting trainings on advocacy skills-building in Northern and Southern California this December 2000. Topics to be covered include:

- Conducting federal, state, and local advocacy
- Building coalitions
- Interacting effectively with the media

Another announcement will be made once training sites and dates have been finalized. Watch for it in the next issue of CALIFORNIA UPDATE!

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Santa Clara County developed the initiative in the wake of the city of San Jose's rejection of a similar plan. In June 2000, the San Jose City Council declined to adopt a plan that would have provided health coverage to the city's 37,000 uninsured children. Soon afterwards, a groundswell of public support for a plan to provide health insurance to all children emerged, prompting Santa Clara County to take action.

The initiative was drafted in part by Working Partnerships, a research institute affiliated with organized labor. As reported in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Bob Brownstein, executive director of the agency, observed, "The notion that children should have a decent chance at the future, because the community wants them to have health (care) . . . is something an enormous majority of people here think is the right thing to do. The support we're getting is pretty much universal."

The initiative will likely be administered by the Santa Clara

Family Health Plan, which already administers Medi-Cal and Healthy Families enrollments for the county. The county has allocated \$3 million of its share of tobacco settlement funds to the initiative, with an additional \$1 million coming from the Santa Clara Family Health Foundation. For the next three years, the county plans to contribute another \$2 million per year in tobacco settlement funds to serve children five years of age and younger.

County officials hope the remaining costs for the program, which may run from \$8 million to \$12 million annually, will be funded by local government and private foundations. Some of the state's largest private foundations, including the Packard Foundation, the California HealthCare Foundation, and the California Wellness Foundation, are currently assessing how to participate in making the initiative possible.

A county staff-produced preliminary report was presented to Santa Clara's board of supervisors on Oct. 4, 2000, and officials are intent on having a final plan approved before the end of 2000.

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cover hospitalizations or major surgery. For more information or to receive an application families can call 818-461-1400. Once an application is submitted, it can take up to two to three months to secure coverage. (Note: CalKids may soon reopen in other counties. Families can call the number listed above for more information.)

Founded in 1992, CalKids receives contributions from businesses, foundations, and individuals. Michael Koch, executive director of CalKids, warns that the program is only a temporary solution. "The philanthropic community has stepped up to the

plate, but ultimately a long term solution requires a public effort," he stated. "Without affordable premiums, families won't get care . . . There are financial, emotional, and physical costs—we see children with serious tooth decay, eye care that has been neglected, children going without glasses. Providing preventive care is much more effective than waiting until these problems become emergencies." Koch hopes that local or state governments will recognize the value of providing care to all children.

Thanks to Maternal and Child Health Access for information on CalKids.