



NILC News Update

FEBRUARY 25, 2009

Please direct comments or questions to aguayo@nilc.org, or call 213-674-2818

Dramatic Victories Benefit Immigrants and Their Families

Happy New Year! It may seem a little odd to be ushering in the new year just before the start of the year's third month. But here at NILC, we're feeling energized and inspired at the prospect of new beginnings, new opportunities, and new horizons. This is because we've had some incredible victories this month that you've no doubt heard about.

These victories on children's health care and economic security represent issues that NILC cares deeply about and has been working on for many years. But we're also excited because they may signal a new political landscape in which immigrants are viewed not as criminals, outlaws, and threats to national security, but as contributing members of society looking for -- and deserving of -- viable means of forging healthy, productive, and prosperous lives.

Investing in Children's Health

After more than a decade of dedicated work to try to undo the harmful impact of restrictions on health care coverage for lawfully residing immigrants, NILC is still woozy from the passage of the Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act of 2009. The new law signed by President Obama at the beginning of this month reauthorized a highly successful program that offers states federal funding to provide affordable health insurance to low- and middle-income children. But it also eliminates a requirement that lawfully residing immigrant children and pregnant women wait 5 long years before being eligible for this federally-funded health care coverage.

This is an incredible victory being celebrated not only by NILC, but also by a whole host of immigrant and health advocates nationwide who tirelessly fought for the elimination of this waiting period, first enacted as part of the 1996 welfare law.

It also seems to mark the first telltale sign that the political climate around immigrants may be changing. Even though immigration restrictionists for over a decade had successfully generated a cloud of fear and caution over what used to be called the Immigrant Children's Health Improvement Act, in the end, advocates drowned out restrictionist cries with this catchphrase: "5 years is a lifetime to a child."

That poignant message was repeated by advocates and policymakers throughout the debate. We are proud to report that this phrase originally came out of focus groups that were part of NILC's strategic communications project to develop messages to promote health care policies that include, rather than exclude, immigrants. Because in past years immigration had been used as a wedge issue to block the elimination of the 5-year waiting period and attack the children's health bill as a whole, NILC embarked on this communications research specifically to develop winning messages that policymakers can use to promote the elimination of health care barriers for immigrants, especially immigrant children.

We are honored to have been a part of this hard-fought victory, and pay homage to the many legal immigrant children and pregnant women who have until now been denied health care coverage under this unjust law. We could not have achieved this critical victory without a diverse and committed

coalition of children's, health, and immigrants' rights allies who also struggled over the years to advance this important policy change. This is not only a major investment in the health of the nation's children, but also a critical first step toward making sure that everyone in the U.S. -- regardless of immigration status -- can get affordable, quality health care.

Economic Recovery for More Workers and Families

Earlier this month, Congress passed the biggest economic stimulus bill in the nation's history. Coordinated advocacy efforts by worker, immigrant, and other advocates across the country ensured that the new law's benefits will be available to many more hardworking and deserving families.

First, a harmful requirement that any company or agency receiving stimulus funds must use E-Verify -- an error-prone program currently being pilot-tested as a means for electronically verifying whether a worker is eligible to work in the U.S. -- was stripped from the final bill.

Anti-immigrant restrictionists have for many years touted the benefits of E-Verify (formerly known as Basic Pilot) as an immigration enforcement tool. But since the program was created 13 years ago, NILC has been at the forefront of efforts to counter these disingenuous claims.

Advocates and policymakers throughout the country see NILC as the primary source of information on the Basic Pilot/E-Verify program, its serious flaws, and the potential negative consequences of a nationwide, mandatory expansion of such electronic employment eligibility systems. Because of NILC's leadership on this issue over the years, a diverse coalition of advocacy groups has begun to share our concerns about a mandatory EEVS outside of the context of broad immigration reform. Policymakers now also increasingly recognize that the current system has problems that need to be addressed. Had the final stimulus bill required the use of E-Verify, it would have caused widespread unemployment and disastrously slowed down the progress of economic recovery.

Second, the final stimulus bill now ensures that many more hardworking taxpayers will be able to get the stimulus tax credit they deserve. If earlier versions of the bill had been enacted, millions of tax-paying citizens and immigrants would have been denied the new "Making Work Pay" tax credit. The versions of the bill passed by the House and Senate would have imposed an overbroad restriction devised in response to anti-immigrant attacks. The restriction would have unfairly penalized citizens and legal immigrant workers who are married to spouses who don't have Social Security numbers. It would have also had the unintended consequence of disqualifying millions of married citizens who file their taxes separately. The bill signed by the President, however, modified the restriction significantly.

NILC fought relentlessly to shed light on how unfair and counterproductive these tax restrictions would be, even when our struggle seemed doomed to failure. Our commitment and unique expertise on issues affecting low-income immigrants proved to be critical in raising awareness about this very complex tax issue for policymakers and advocates alike. As a result of NILC's advocacy, an additional four million low- and middle-income taxpayers will now be eligible to receive the stimulus tax credits they rightly deserve.

All of these hopeful developments may very well signal a changing political climate. They may also pave the way for broader immigration reforms and policy changes that continue to improve the lives of low-income immigrants in dramatic ways.

Again, thank you for your invaluable support of NILC!

**Help make sure that NILC is
able to continue securing
victories like these.
[Make a tax-deductible](#)**

[donation today!](#)

PS: Please forward this message's link (<http://www.nilc.org/pubs/iru/news-2009-02-25.htm>) to others like you who want to help make a difference.

National Immigration Law Center
3435 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 2850
Los Angeles, CA 90010
213.639.3900
www.nilc.org