



PENNSYLVANIA IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP COALITION

Advocating for refugees, migrants, and immigrants in Pennsylvania

The Case Against Restricting Access to Public Benefits

Pennsylvania Senate Bill 9 and House Bill 41, 738, 809 have been introduced in the 2011 Legislative Session with the ostensible intention of cracking down on people illegally receiving benefits. They mandate that agencies administering a wide variety of public benefits must, in addition to verifying applicants' legal immigration status, require applicants to present government-issued ID.

IMPACT: Denial of benefits to eligible people – especially Pennsylvania's most vulnerable citizens; unnecessary use of tax payer money; creation of hostility towards immigrants; deterring eligible people from seeking benefits

Government ID is Increasingly Hard to Get, Even for Citizens

- It can take months of work and countless visits to the Social Security Administration, PennDOT, and the Department of Health to obtain or replace government-issued ID.
- Many US citizens do not have government issued ID, including¹
 - 15% of citizens earning less than \$35,000 per year (500,000 Pennsylvanians)
 - 18% of citizens aged 65 or above (almost 400,000 Pennsylvanians)
 - 25% of adult African-American citizens

A Waste of Taxpayer Money - Implementation is Costly, Savings are Unlikely

- In 2008, the Rendell Administration estimated that the bill would cost \$19 million to implement.²
- In 2006, Colorado passed a similar bill. State agencies experienced an initial implementation cost of \$2 million and could not identify any savings achieved.³
- A study by the US House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform in July 2007 found that for every \$100 spent by federal taxpayers to administer immigration documentation requirements in the Medicaid program, the federal government saved only 14 cents. Among the states studied, they found only 8 undocumented recipients out of 3.6 million.⁴

The "Problem" Doesn't Exist

- Undocumented immigrants are *already* barred from *all* major public benefit programs in PA.
- There is not even one documented case of an undocumented immigrant receiving benefits that they should not have gotten. The PA Department of Welfare investigates any claims of people improperly receiving benefits.
- Due to language and cultural barriers, documented, eligible immigrants use public benefits at lower rates than citizens. Other barriers to immigrants accessing public benefits include: 1) fear that immigration service will consider them a public charge, blocking a future citizenship application, 2) lack of knowledge about services or eligibility, and 3) in mixed-status families, fears that family members could be deported. Therefore, emphasis should be placed on increasing access rather than increasing barriers.

¹ "Citizens Without Proof: A Survey of Americans' Possession of Documentary Proof of Citizenship and Photo Identification," Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law, November 2006, available at http://www.brennancenter.org/dynamic/subpages/download_file_39242.pdf

² Rossi, Vincent. Fiscal Note. March 31, 2008.

³ Mark P. Couch, "Colorado Immigration Law Falls Short of Goal; State Agencies: \$2 Million Cost and No Savings," *Denver Post*, Jan. 25, 2007, available at http://www.denverpost.com/ci_5081255.

⁴ Majority Staff of the House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, "Medicaid Citizenship Documentation Requirements Deny Coverage To Citizens And Cost Taxpayers Millions," July 24, 2007, available at <http://oversight.house.gov/documents/20070724110341.pdf>.

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