



Neighbors Link

March 2022

Legislative Newsletter

Neighbors Link strongly supports budgets and policies that respect the dignity of each human and recognize the contributions made by immigrants. The following pages discuss key legislative and budget issues we are working for in New York in 2022.

Access to Representation Act

Unlike in criminal proceedings, where defendants are given a lawyer if they cannot afford one, immigrants do not have the right to a government paid attorney in immigration court. Those unable to afford a private attorney must find a nonprofit to help or represent themselves, which makes a huge difference. 60% of immigrants with lawyers win their cases versus 17% of those who do not have legal help. For immigrants who are detained, only 2% win their cases without a lawyer. New York State has a chance to remedy this situation by passing a first-in-the-nation piece of legislation that would empower immigrants to protect themselves and their families.

Advocacy Item

- Pass the Access to Representation Act (S.81A / A.01961) to ensure the right to counsel for all immigrants facing deportation in New York. This act would also mandate stable funding streams for immigration legal services.

Fully Fund Immigration Legal Services

Immigration legal services are critically important. Having access to an attorney is often the difference between a family staying together or being broken apart. Unfortunately, existing resources for affordable legal services are incredibly scarce. By fully funding immigration legal services, New York State can help promote safety and security for immigrant communities.

Advocacy Items

- New York State should increase the funding for immigration legal services to \$15.3 million, from the current \$10 million. This would allow legal representatives within the Liberty Defense Project to work existing cases and allow new providers to serve another 1,000 New Yorkers.
- In addition, the budget of the Office for New Americans should be increased to \$9.1 million from its current \$6.4 million to restore full funding to ONA Opportunity Centers. These centers provide critical services to immigrants, including processing naturalization applications.

Fully Fund the Excluded Workers Fund

Immigrants tend to be over-represented in industries that were hardest hit by the economic impacts of the pandemic, yet many immigrants were also cruelly excluded from any government assistance during COVID. Last year, the passage of the \$2.1 billion Excluded Workers Fund provided critical relief to thousands of working families who had been excluded from government relief during COVID because of their immigration status. Unfortunately, just nine weeks after opening the fund, the Department of Labor closed applications because the fund had run out. Additional funding is needed to ensure access for all eligible workers.

Advocacy Item

- Allocate an additional \$3 billion to the Excluded Workers Fund to ensure all eligible workers have access.



Excluded Worker Unemployment Program

Hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers are currently not eligible for unemployment insurance because of their status or the kind of work that they do. This includes undocumented workers, those who are part of the cash economy (including many domestic workers and day laborers) and many self-employed workers in low-income industries. When these workers lose jobs or income, they have nowhere to turn to support themselves or their families. A permanent fix is needed to ensure that all workers have access to a basic safety net.

Advocacy Item

- The Excluded No More Legislation would create a permanent program to provide compensation for workers who lose a job or income but are not currently covered by traditional unemployment insurance.

Coverage for All

Throughout the pandemic, immigrant essential workers have put themselves and their families at risk to keep our communities fed and cared for. However, 154,000 New Yorkers are currently uninsured because of their immigration status. Other states, including California and Illinois, have remedied this situation using state funds. New York needs to allocate funds to make immigrants eligible for affordable, quality coverage through a state-funded essential plan.

Advocacy Item

- Pass the Coverage for All Act (A880/S1572) to create a state-funded essential plan for all New Yorkers up to 200% of the federal poverty level who are currently excluded because of their status.



New York for All

Our entire community is safer when all residents, regardless of immigration status, feel safe driving to work, taking their kids to school and reporting crimes to law enforcement. Unfortunately, many members of the immigrant community often feel unsafe interacting with state and local government agencies for fear that this will lead to a devastating interaction with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

The Westchester County Immigrant Protection Act was an important local step in building trust between local residents and law enforcement by defining what information county law enforcement can share with federal officials. It is now critical that we bring this legislation to the state level.

Advocacy Item

- Pass the New York for All Act (S.7562/A.9586) to broadly prohibit state and local officers from enforcing federal immigration laws, funneling people into ICE custody, and sharing sensitive information with ICE.