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Please Co-Sponsor Priority Legislation FOR IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION AND STRONGER, SAFER COMMUNITIES

We would value your co-sponsorship of these priority bills to support immigrant integration! To learn more, please contact: Shannon Erwin, State Policy Director: 617-350-5480 x222 or serwin@miracoalition.org.

Hope for Abuse Survivors. (SD.61, *An Act Relative to Special Juveniles*; Sen. Creem. HD. 507, *Relative to petitions to the Juvenile Court or Probate Court on behalf of certain special juveniles*, Rep. Kafa.) Certain immigrant youth under 21 who have been abandoned, abused or neglected by their parents may apply to the federal government for classification as “Special Immigrant Juveniles,” a status created by Congress in 1990 with bipartisan support. In order to apply for classification, youths must first access state courts to seek required predicate assessments of their abuse histories. The Special Juvenile bill would make a small technical change to comport our State Probate and Family Court procedures with federal processes, remedying an unintentional barrier that currently prevents youths ages 18-20 from applying for the necessary predicate assessments of their abuse histories.

Safe Driving. (HD.1650, *An Act relative to safe driving*; Sen. Jehlen, Rep. Farley-Bouvier.) Most Massachusetts residents need to drive – to take children to school or the doctor, buy groceries, and perform other tasks. Yet, some immigrant residents are not permitted to through the testing process to earn a license. These residents are eager to earn permission to drive lawfully with full knowledge of traffic laws, and to contribute their fair share of payments to the RMV and insurance pool, but many are currently driving unlicensed. A growing number of states have passed Safe Driving Bills to reduce the number of unlicensed, uninsured drivers by removing immigration status as a barrier to learner’s permits and licenses. Ten states plus Washington D.C. allow and require resident drivers to become licensed regardless of immigration status: Illinois, Maryland, Colorado, California, Vermont, Nevada, Connecticut, Washington, New Mexico and Utah. The Safe Driving Bill would remove immigration status as a barrier to becoming a trained, licensed and insured driver in Massachusetts. The Massachusetts RMV estimated that the bill would bring \$15 million in revenue to MA through fee payments by immigrant drivers.

Restoring Trust. (SD.1698, *For legislation to restore community trust in Massachusetts law enforcement*, Sen. Eldridge; HD.3204, *For legislation to clarify the responsibility of law enforcement agencies to enforce federal immigration law*, Rep. Carvalho.) The implementation of the federal “Secure Communities” program (“S-Comm”) in Massachusetts separated many families through deportation and caused many more to live in fear of the police – prolonging situations of domestic violence and harming community policing efforts. Widespread recognition of S-Comm’s harms led federal authorities to rebrand and rename the program, yet its successor, the “Priority Enforcement Program” (“PEP”), continues to dissuade immigrants from reporting crime. The Trust Act would provide clear guidelines to police in Massachusetts about cooperation with immigration detainers and requests for information-sharing by Immigration and Customs Enforcement and would conserve local resources for local public safety priorities, protect our state and localities from potential liability for violating residents’ constitutional rights, and help our police restore strong, cooperative relationships with immigrant communities.

Language Opportunities for Our Kids. (SD.743, HD. 2211, *An Act for Language Opportunities for Our Kids*, Sen. DiDomenico, Rep. Sanchez.) Currently, Massachusetts schools have extremely limited options to help English Language Learners (ELLs) become English-proficient and meet academic standards. Many students cannot learn in their classes, and ELLs face a widening achievement gap and higher drop-out rates than native-English speaking peers. Native-English speaking students are likewise denied the opportunities that a broader range of language instruction options would offer to acquire second language skills for the 21st century. The LOOK Bill would provide schools with the flexibility they need to offer programs that help all students achieve English proficiency as well as increase language opportunities for native-English speakers, thereby helping close the achievement gap and strengthening the competitiveness of our future workforce.

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Health Care Access. MIRA is a member of the Affordable Care Today (ACT!!) Coalition. Among our priority bills to improve health care access and affordability are those related to:

- **The Children’s Medical Security Program. (SD.557, HD.2580, *An Act improving the children’s medical security program and simplifying the administration process*, Sen. Didomenico, Rep. Malia.)**

Children without access to private health insurance through their parents and ineligible for other public health insurance programs may be eligible for the Children’s Medical Security Program (CMSP). Unfortunately, CMSP coverage is limited by strict caps on services that can pose challenges for children’s health. The CMSP Bill would give EOHHS flexibility to eliminate service caps while staying within the legislature’s appropriation for the program.

- **Preserving Affordable Health Coverage. (SD.1349, HD.1023, *An Act to Preserve Affordable Health Care for Massachusetts Residents*, Sen. Jehlen, Rep. Balsler.)**

For those living in or near poverty, even small premiums can eliminate meaningful choice of plans. When the Commonwealth Care program was repealed as part of the ACA transition, certain affordability protections were not re-enacted. This bill will help ensure that premiums and cost-sharing are affordable for all ConnectorCare members.

- **Reduce Out of Pocket Costs. (SD.656, HD.1690, *An Act to keep people healthy by removing barriers to cost-effective care*, Sen. Lewis, Rep. Farley-Bouvier.)**

High out-of-pocket health care costs can pose a barrier to health. From health and cost standpoints, it is wise to treat conditions now, in a manner prescribed by physicians, rather than pay for complications later. The Barrier-free Care Bill would create a panel of experts to recommend high-value, cost-effective services, treatments and medications that would not be subject to co-pays or deductibles under all fully-insured health plans, including MassHealth and commercial insurance.

- **Ensuring Low-Income Children Have Medical Coverage (SD.1601, HD.2709, *An Act to Ensure Continued Health Insurance Coverage for Children*, Sen. L’Italien, Rep. Cronin.)**

The Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) provides high quality medical coverage to low income children and pregnant women who don’t qualify for Medicaid, but CHIP is only funded through September 30, 2015. Should Congress not retain funding for the program, tens of thousands of children in Massachusetts will lose their health coverage. This bill would ensure that children continue to receive coverage for needed care.

Higher Education Affordability. Under current MA law, only citizens and students who hold documented immigration statuses may pay in-state tuition at public higher education institutions. Other immigrant students are ineligible to pay in-state tuition at our public colleges and universities, though they often know no home but Massachusetts. Moreover, even many documented immigrants are ineligible for state financial aid, placing college out of reach for a significant portion of those who are eligible to pay in-state tuition. Nineteen states, including New York, Connecticut and Rhode Island, have tuition equity policies and/or non-discriminatory financial aid policies in place – many, including New Jersey, Colorado and Florida, with bipartisan support. The Higher Education Opportunity Bill (SD.599, HD.1035, *An Act regarding higher education opportunities for high school graduates in the Commonwealth*, Sen. Chang-Diaz, Rep. Provost.) would allow students who have attended a Massachusetts high school for three years or more and have graduated or received the equivalent of a diploma to pay the same in-state tuition rates to our public higher education system as their peers, regardless of immigration status, **and** would remove immigration status as a barrier to financial aid eligibility in MA. Additionally, the Tuition Equity Bill (SD.690, *Relative to the eligibility of students for in-state tuition rates and fees at public higher educational institutions*, Sen. Forry) would focus on in-state tuition eligibility, allowing students who have attended a Massachusetts high school for three years or more and have graduated or received the equivalent of a diploma to pay the same in-state tuition rates to our public higher education system as their peers, regardless of immigration status.

Local Choice to Expand Voting Rights. (HD.377, *For legislation to enable cities and towns to extend voting rights in municipal elections to certain non-citizens of the Commonwealth*, Rep. Rushing.) Non-citizen immigrants are tax-paying, contributing residents and should have a voice in our democracy. Under current law, however, in order to extend voting rights for local elections to certain non-citizens, localities must pass local ordinances, file home rule petitions, and achieve passage in the state legislature. This bill would put the decision of whether to extend voting rights for local elections in the hands of cities and towns by lifting the requirement of home rule petitions and requiring instead that such measures be approved by a city council and a majority of voters in a local referendum.

Protection from Discrimination (HD.2903, *An act ensuring access to services for all residents of the Commonwealth*, Rep. Rushing.) Due to fears of inquiries into immigration status, many immigrants are fearful of interaction with state agencies, undermining those agencies’ ability to connect families with important information and services. *An Act ensuring equal access to services for all residents of the Commonwealth* would provide clear guidance that inquiries into immigration status by state agencies and recipients of state funds are not permissible unless required by law or necessary to assist immigrants to apply for lawful immigration status or citizenship.

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