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MIRA FY10 Conference Committee Budget Analysis

On June 19, 2009, one day after the release of the Conference Committee's report, the Senate and House passed the final version of the legislature's budget. The Governor now has 10 days to offer amendments and vetoes to the legislature's budget, after which the legislature can override vetoes by a two-thirds margin or adopt the Governor's amendments by a majority vote.

Despite raising revenue through the passage of an increase in the sales tax and local option taxes, the budget included severe cuts to all areas of government. Numerous programs and groups saw their funding slashed or eliminated. The immigrant community was hit particularly hard.

MIRA's priorities took deep cuts and, in some situations, immigrants were targeted in efforts to cut costs and close the budget gap. In particular, **Section 121 of the legislature's final budget cuts eligibility for "special status" immigrants in Commonwealth Care**, a cut that, if finalized, would drive **28,000 legal immigrants** currently on the program into Emergency Medicaid services or the Health Safety Net. This cut represents 15% of Commonwealth Care enrollment and is the first major setback in coverage since the passage of health reform legislation.

In another instance, **the Citizenship Services line item was cut down to \$250,000, a 62% reduction from initial FY09 levels**. These low levels of funding threaten the ability of providers to maintain their programs and provide needed services to low-income immigrants who wish to become naturalized U.S. citizens.

As a member of the **Stop the Cuts Coalition**, MIRA recognizes the importance of increasing revenues to fund the vital programs and services upon which many jobs and lives depend. We need new, substantial and progressive revenue sources if we hope to restore funding to the programs that help change lives and give hope to so many.

As the budget moves to the Governor's desk, MIRA and its allies are committed to seeking the best results for programs serving immigrant communities across the Commonwealth and to restoring coverage for 28,000 legal immigrants whose well-being relies on a return to the promise and values of health reform and the goal of insuring all residents of Massachusetts. Today, MIRA and its health care allies delivered nearly 250 letters to the Governor, asking him to veto or amend Section 121 of the budget and restore Commonwealth Care eligibility for this group of 28,000 immigrants.

The following is an analysis of how the legislature's final budget impacted each of MIRA's budgetary priorities:

Section 121 of the legislature’s budget cuts eligibility for “special status” immigrants in Commonwealth Care. The cut in eligibility would drive 28,000 legal immigrants, including new legal permanent residents (green card holders) without 5 years in a qualified status, into Emergency Medicaid and the Health Safety Net. The eligibility cut is contrary to the Commonwealth’s stated goal of insuring all residents, undermines the values and goals of Health Reform, and shifts costs to the already overburdened safety net health care system. The cut is unacceptable.

MIRA and its allies will be working with the Governor’s Office to ensure Section 121 is vetoed or amended by Governor Patrick. If the Governor chooses to veto the section, it would require two-thirds of the House and Senate to override the veto. If the Governor amends the section and sends it back to the legislature, it requires a majority vote from members of both chambers to amend the budget. Please contact the Governor’s Office at 888-870-7770 and urge him to veto or amend Section 121 of the legislature’s budget.

Next Steps: MIRA and its allies will be working with the Governor’s Office to ensure the restoration of Commonwealth Care coverage to 28,000 legal immigrants.

The **Citizenship for New Americans Program (CNAP) (Line item 4003-0122)** was cut to **\$250,000** in the legislature’s final budget, a decrease of 62% from initial FY09 funding levels. This low level of funding threatens the ability of providers to maintain their programs and provide needed services to low-income immigrants who wish to become naturalized U.S. citizens, but face numerous economic, legal and other barriers to doing so. The language of the line item was also changed so that priority is given to immigrants who, through naturalization, would move from state-funded benefits (EAEDC) to federally-funded benefits (SSI). Subject to an unexpected veto or amendment, CNAP will be funded at \$250,000 in FY10.

The legislature’s budget included **\$28,085,096 for Adult Basic Education (ABE) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) (Line item 7035-0002)**. This figure represents a reduction of more than \$3 million from FY09 levels of \$31.1 million and a reduction of \$1.9 million after this year’s 9-C cuts brought the value down to \$29.9 million. Subject to an unexpected veto or amendment, ABE/ESOL will be funded at \$28,085,096 in FY10.

The **Workforce Training Fund (WTF) was funded at \$10 million (line item 7003-0701)** in the legislature’s final budget, a decrease of \$11 million from initial FY09 levels. The Governor and House proposed \$21 million and MIRA was asking for full funding at \$21 million to help facilitate the implementation of a Dedicated Fund for ABE/ESOL that combines funding from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s workplace education grants with funds from the WTF to create a single, streamlined fund that expands resources for workplace education. The WTF is funded exclusively through employer contributions in the form of a surcharge on Unemployment Insurance and, as such, should not impact the General Fund. Subject to a veto or amendment, the WTF will be funded at \$10 million in FY10.

For more information or questions, please contact Toby Guevin at 617-350-5480 x216 or tguevin@miracoalition.org

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The line item containing the **Refugee and Immigrant Safety and Empowerment (RISE) Program (4513-1130)** took an additional cut from the House and Senate budget amounts down to **\$4,908,264** in the legislature’s final budget, and **language referring to “immigrants and refugees” was included in the line item.** The additional cut of \$150,000 brings the total reduction to 23% of FY09 levels. Furthermore, the Conference Committee added an additional program to the line item, which could have a negative impact on funding to other programs in the line item, including RISE. The severe cut in funding threatens the stability of programs and the provision of essential services for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. Because the Department of Public Health is responsible for administering the funds for RISE and other programs in the line item, it is unclear what the funding level of RISE will be in FY10. MIRA will provide information on the funding level as soon as possible.

The **MassHealth Outreach Grant Program was funded through Section 129 in the legislature’s budget, which asks two agencies (HEFA and the Connector) to continue their contributions to outreach at \$2.5 million.** The grant program was eliminated in both the Governor’s House 1 budget and the Final House budget. The inclusion of funding for the MassHealth Outreach Grant Program should be considered a victory, since indications from numerous legislators were that it was unlikely to be included in the budget. The grants are matched at 60.2% by the federal government, so the cost to the Commonwealth would only be \$980,000. Because the Governor did not include the Outreach Grant Program in either of his budgets, there is the possibility that he may look to veto or amend the section. Subject to this veto or amendment, the MassHealth Outreach Grant program will continue to be funded, likely at \$2.5 million.

Budget Item	FY09 (9C)	House 1 (#1)	House W&M	Final House	Senate W&M	Final Senate	House 1 (#2)	Conference Committee
<i>Citizenship</i> 4003-0122	\$605,000	\$580,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$250,000	\$250,000	\$250,000	\$250,000
<i>ABE/ESOL</i> 7035-0002	\$29,995,000	\$29,223,195	\$28,058,646	\$28,058,646	\$28,058,096	\$28,058,096	\$28,223,195	\$28,058,096
<i>RISE</i> 4513-1130	\$6,353,000	Consolidated	\$4,058,264	\$5,108,264	\$4,058,264	\$5,058,264	Consolidated	\$4,908,264
<i>MassHealth O & E</i> 4000-0352	\$3,500,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$2,500,000 (outside section 73 language)	\$2,500,000 (outside section 73 language)	\$0	\$2,500,000 (outside section 129)
<i>Workforce Training Fund</i> 7003-0701	\$12,000,000	\$21,000,000	\$15,000,000	\$21,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$10,000,000	\$18,000,000	\$10,000,000
<i>Commonwealth Care Eligibility</i> Senate Outside Section 73	X	X	X	X	Eliminates coverage for 28,000 special status immigrants	Eliminates coverage for 28,000 special status immigrants	X	Eliminates coverage for 28,000 special status immigrants

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