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MIRA FY10 Senate Ways & Means Budget Analysis

On May 13, 2009, the Senate Committee on Ways & Means released their version of the budget. The Senate was working with \$1.5 billion less than the Governor and House's budget proposals and all areas of government have seen drastic cuts and 77 line items have been eliminated from the budget. As a member of the **Stop the Cuts Coalition**, MIRA and its allies will work actively to reduce the cuts and support new revenues to ensure that funding exists for amendments.

MIRA's priorities took severe cuts and, in some situations, immigrants were targeted in efforts to cut costs and close the budget gap. In particular, **Outside Section 77 of the Senate Ways & Means budget cuts eligibility for "special status" immigrants in Commonwealth Care**, a cut that would drive 28,000 immigrants currently on the program into Emergency Medicaid services or the Health Safety Net. MIRA and its allies strongly oppose the Outside Section and are working to line up a sponsor for an amendment striking Outside Section 77. Eliminating coverage for 28,000 "special status" immigrants will exacerbate the stress on the state's safety net hospitals and health clinics, erode the Commonwealth's commitment to comprehensive coverage, and undermine the values of Health Reform.

In another instance, **language was removed in line item 4513-1130 that ensures funding for the Refugee and Immigrant Safety and Empowerment (RISE) Program**. While the lack of language does not necessarily threaten continued funding for the program, it does show that the Senate Committee on Ways & Means has targeted immigrant communities in an effort to cut costs. **The Citizenship Services line item was also cut by 50% from the House budget down to \$250,000.**

The following is an analysis of how the Senate Ways & Means budget impacted each of MIRA's budgetary priorities:

Outside Section 77 of the Senate Ways & Means budget, despite a drafting error in the language, intends to cut eligibility for "special status" immigrants in Commonwealth Care.

The cut in eligibility would drive 28,000 "special status" or PRUCOL immigrants into Emergency Medicaid and the Health Safety Net. The eligibility cut is contrary to the Commonwealth's stated goal of insuring all residents and undermines the values and goals of Health Reform. Furthermore, because Commonwealth Care and the Health Safety Net are supported through the same funding mechanism, costs are merely being shifted to the state's safety net hospitals and community health centers, who have already taken a huge hit in this year's budget. Next Steps: MIRA is working with allies in the legislature to file an amendment striking Outside Section 77.

The **Citizenship for New Americans Program (CNAP) (Line item 4003-0122)** was cut to **\$250,000** in the Senate Ways & Means budget, which represents a 50% cut from the Final House budget and a decrease of 62% from initial FY09 funding levels. There was also a language change in the line item that prioritizes services for immigrants who, through naturalization, would move from state-funded benefits (EAEDC) to federally-funded benefits (SSI). This language change was essential in maintaining the line item because it highlights the cost-savings of citizenship services in addition to its positive impact on the lives of low-income immigrants in the naturalization process. Next Steps: Senator Chandler of Worcester will be filing an amendment to increase the funding for CNAP to the House level of \$500,000.

The Senate Ways & Means budget included **\$28,085,646 for Adult Basic Education and English for Speakers of Other Languages (Line item 7035-0002)**, which represents a reduction of more than \$3 million from FY09 levels of \$31.1 million, a reduction of \$1.9 million after this year's 9-C cuts brought the value down to \$29.9 million, and a cut of more than \$1.1 million from the Governor's recommendation of \$29,223,195. Next Steps: An amendment will not be filed in the Senate to increase the ABE/ESOL line item, since the current level of appropriations is a considerable victory in the current fiscal climate.

The **Workforce Training Fund (WTF) was funded at \$5 million (line item 7003-0701)**, a decrease of \$16 million from the Final House budget. 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 Workplace Education 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 tax on wages and, as such, should not impact the General Fund.

The line item containing the **Refugee and Immigrant Safety and Empowerment (RISE) Program (4513-1130)** took a severe cut of over 40% down to **\$4,058,264** from nearly \$6.4 million and **language referring to "immigrants and refugees" was eliminated from the line item**. While the cut in language does not necessarily threaten continued funding for RISE, it indicates that Senate Ways & Means' did not prioritize domestic violence and sexual assault services for immigrants and refugees. The severe cut in funding threatens the stability of programs and the provision of essential services for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. Next Steps: MIRA is working with other programs and advocates in the line item on an amendment to restore funding and language to the line item.

The **MassHealth Outreach and Enrollment Grants line item (4000-0352)** were funded at **\$2.5 million** the Senate Ways & Means budget through **Outside Section 73**. The grant program was eliminated in both the Governor's House 1 budget and the Final House budget. MIRA and its allies were asking for level-funding of \$3.5 million. The inclusion of funding for the MassHealth Outreach Grant Program is a victory for advocates, 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. Next Steps: MIRA and its allies are working on a possible amendment to the budget increasing funding to the FY09 level of \$3.5 million.

Please contact your Senator to urge them to support immigrant communities throughout the Commonwealth by co-sponsoring the amendments for MIRA's budgetary priorities. Below is the contact information for Senators as well as Senate leadership:

General Number: 617-722-2000

Senate Chairman of Ways & Means Panagiotakos: 617-722-1630

Senate President Murray: (617) 722-1500

If you do not know who your State Representative and/or Senator are, please visit:

<http://www.wheredoivotema.com>.

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