

Support English Language Learners!

THE ISSUE

Massachusetts has a large and growing immigrant population; we currently rank 8th in the country in total immigrant population with over 900,000. This represents an increase of over 60% from 1990. Immigrants make up 14% of our state's population and 17% of our workforce and are the only reason that our state's population and workforce have been holding steady over the last decade. However, it is estimated that 20% of our state's immigrants have a severe English-speaking deficit, 29% lack a high school diploma or equivalent, and 34% have a literacy challenge.

While Massachusetts has been making an attempt at dealing with this problem through the Adult Basic Education (ABE), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and Citizenship for New Americans (CNA) programs, the state is unable to provide the resources necessary to reach all those who are seeking assistance in learning English. Moreover, these programs only support educational efforts aimed at adult immigrants, the education of children is left to local school districts, many of which do not provide appropriate services. In order for Massachusetts to have a workforce capable – now and into the future – of meeting the needs of business, we must commit more resources to providing English education to our residents.

THE SOLUTION

On July 24th, Representative Michael Honda and Senator Hillary Clinton introduced in their respective houses of Congress the Strengthening Communities Through Education and Integration Act of 2008 (H.R. 6617/S. 3334). The bill focuses on increasing the availability of English and civics classes for both children and adults while also attempting, through tax credits, to involve business in the provision of services to employees. It would also provide integration grants for states that form State New American Councils that would bring numerous stakeholders together to analyze the challenges facing immigrant communities and to develop, implement, expand, or enhance a comprehensive integration plan. These grants would still be available to states that have integration structures similar to a State New American Council and it is probable that the New Americans Agenda established by Governor Deval Patrick would qualify.

TAKE ACTION!

H.R. 6617/S. 3334 would provide huge benefits to our state's and our nation's immigrant populations, our businesses, and our economy. Despite this, the House bill has only 14 cosponsors and there are no cosponsors in the Senate. No one from our state's congressional delegation has signed onto the bill. MIRA urges you to call your representative and our state's senators and ask them to:

- Sign on as a cosponsor of the bill, and
- Play a leadership role in seeing that this bill becomes law by urging their colleagues in Congress support this legislation.