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### **MIRA FY10 Final House Budget Analysis**

The House Committee on Ways & Means released the House Ways & Means version of the budget on April 15, 2009. Over the next two weeks, Representatives filed and debated amendments to the budget, before passing the final version of the House budget on Friday, May 1st.

Considering the current fiscal realities in Massachusetts and across the U.S., it is difficult to determine and define success this year. Furthermore, with revenue projections decreasing by the day and an estimated \$456 million shortfall in April revenue, there will be more cuts ahead in the not too distant future, and the Senate will likely have fewer funds to work with than their counterparts in the House.

Nearly all programs and line items across the final House budget received cuts, including many of MIRA's budget priorities. Some of MIRA's priorities received minor cuts, others received larger cuts, and one program was completely eliminated from the final House budget. Of the five amendments filed on behalf of MIRA's priorities, only two were added to the budget, and one of those was at half the desired level. Still, in this economic climate, every victory is important.

One important victory took place when an anti-immigrant amendment (Amendment #287 filed by Rep. Perry of Sandwich) that would have increased citizenship and immigration status verification requirements was voted down and replaced by a cost-benefit study that keeps the amendment out of the budget. The anti-immigrant amendment was defeated by a margin of 116-40. Numerous Representatives spoke up against the amendment on the floor and leadership assured its defeat. Please thank those who both supported our budget priorities and voted down the anti-immigrant amendment. We must be ready for similar anti-immigrant amendments in the Senate, where they have been successful in the past.

The following is an analysis of how MIRA's budgetary priorities fared in the final House budget:

**The Citizenship for New Americans Program (CNAP) (Line item 4003-0122) was funded at \$500,000** in the final House budget, which represents a \$80,000 cut from the Governor's House 1 budget recommendation of \$580,000 and a decrease of \$110,000 from post-9C levels in FY09. MIRA thanks the House Ways & Means Committee for providing funding at levels equal to FY08, particularly considering the budget climate. Please thank Rep. Tony Cabral of New Bedford at 617-722-2017 for filing an amendment that would have increase citizenship funding.

The final House budget includes **\$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. MIRA and its allies are asking for funding at FY08 levels of \$30.1 million. During times of economic crisis, MIRA and its allies feel that investing in the education and English language skills of the

Commonwealth's workforce and residents is a sound investment. The ABE/ESOL line item has been hit by a number of cuts in the last year, which total \$3 million. Because everyone in the Commonwealth benefits from investments in our workforce, particularly in difficult economic times, we hope that the Senate budget recognizes this by funding ABE and ESOL at \$30.1 million. Please thank Representative Frank Smizik of Brookline at 617-722-2676 and Representative Linda Dean Campbell of Methuen at 617-722-2877 for filing amendments that would have increased funding for ABE/ESOL.

**The Workforce Training Fund (WTF) was funded at \$21 million (line item 7003-0701)** in the final House budget, after Representatives Coakley-Rivera and Rodrigues had their amendments added to the budget to increase the line item by \$6 million. The Governor also proposed \$21 million in the House 1 budget and MIRA was asking for full funding at \$21 million to help facilitate the implementation of a Dedicated Fund for Workplace 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 ABE/ESOL. The WTF is funded 100% through a tax on employers and, thus, does not impact funding of the General Fund. Please thank Representatives Coakley-Rivera of Springfield at 617-722-2014 and Representative Rodrigues of Westport at 617-722-2230 for filing amendments to fully fund the Workforce Training Fund at \$21 million.

The line item containing the **Refugee and Immigrant Safety and Empowerment (RISE) Program (4513-1130) was funded at \$5,108,264** in the final House budget, down from nearly \$6.4 million in FY09. The impact of the 20% cut on the RISE program will not be known until after the budget process, since the funds in the line item are disbursed through the Department of Public Health. As a result, it is currently unknown how the reduced funding will impact immigrants and refugees' access to culturally and linguistically-appropriate domestic violence and sexual assault services, although language ensures the program will continue. The \$300,000 set-aside for services for immigrants and refugees was eliminated, with the only positive coming in the language of the line item, which remains broad and inclusive of all immigrants. MIRA and its allies had been asking for level-funding of the line item at \$6.4 million with \$1,319,854 going to RISE. Please thank Representative Liz Malia of Boston at 617-722-2060 and Representative Driscoll of Braintree at 617-722-2396 for filing amendments to either increase funding for RISE and/or the line item.

**The MassHealth Outreach and Enrollment Grants line item (4000-0352) was eliminated from the final House budget.** The elimination of the line item reflects the Governor's House 1 budget. MIRA and its allies are asking for level-funding at \$3.5 million. Federal matching funds cover 60.2% (or \$2.1 million) of the total in the line item, with the Commonwealth only responsible for \$1.4 million. Unfortunately, the Governor and the House have failed to understand the importance of the grants to helping hard-to-reach populations, including immigrant communities and limited English proficient residents, retain coverage throughout the confusing enrollment reverification process. MIRA feels that the elimination of the line item will do nothing to reduce costs in the budget, as costly turnover in the system will increase, valuable time and energy will be lost navigating an incredibly complex system in which outreach and enrollment grantees have valuable expertise, and emergency room usage will increase. Please thank Representative Jim O'Day of Worcester at 617-722-2220 and Representative John Scibak of South Hadley at 617-722-2370 for filing amendments that would have reinstated the line item at \$3.5 million.

**Anti-immigrant Amendment #287, filed by Rep. Perry of Sandwich, that would have unnecessarily changed citizenship documentation and immigration status verification procedures at benefit-granting agencies for all federal and state benefits was defeated.** Representative Alice Wolf of Cambridge offered a further amendment that called for a cost-benefit analysis of immigrants in the Commonwealth, a legislative maneuver that keeps the anti-immigrant amendment out of the budget. Aside from opposing the fundamental premise upon which Amendment #287 was filed—the assumption that benefit fraud from undocumented immigrants is widespread—MIRA and its allies fought anti-immigrant Amendment #287 because research has shown that increased citizenship documentation requirement disproportionately impact low-income U.S. citizens; require additional funding for outreach and education on new procedures and, as a result, represented an unfunded mandate; and our belief that current documentation and immigration status verification procedures already disenfranchise enough immigrant families who are eligible for federal and state benefits, among other reasons. Please review how your Representative voted and make sure they supported Rep. Wolf’s amendment by voting “Yea;” if they voted “Nay” please contact them to express your concerns and ask for their reasoning. Please also thank Representatives Wolf, Cabral, Swan, Bosley, Toomey, Sanchez, St. Fleur, and O’Flaherty who spoke on the floor against Amendment #287 and in favor of Rep. Wolf’s study.

Now, the budget process moves on to the Senate. The following is the projected timeline of the Senate budget:

**May 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup>: Senate Ways & Means releases its budget**

**May 15<sup>th</sup> at 5pm: Deadline for filing amendments**

**May 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup>: Begin budget debate**

**May 21<sup>st</sup>: Finish budget debate**

Please contact your Senator to urge them to support immigrant communities throughout the Commonwealth by co-sponsoring and supporting the line items and 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 questions or more information, please contact Toby Guevin, MIRA’s State Policy Director, at [tguevin@miracoalition.org](mailto:tguevin@miracoalition.org) or 617-350-5480 x216.