

# MIRA PRIORITIES FOR AN INCLUSIVE COVID-19 RESPONSE



The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically exposed inequities in our Commonwealth and deepened the vulnerability of many residents. Immigrant families are particularly hard-hit, risking life and health by working in health care, elder care, transportation, and grocery stores, or facing job losses without access to unemployment benefits or other assistance. MIRA Coalition members advocate for state action on:

## **Language access for COVID-19 resources and other vital state programs**

One in 11 Mass. residents is limited-English-proficient, and we have one of the most diverse immigrant populations in the nation, but most resources provided by the state, especially application forms, are English-only, which impedes access. *We urge the state to swiftly make multilingual resources available online – and in formats that are easy to read on smartphones, which many immigrants use to access the internet.*

## **Emergency cash & food assistance**

Immigrant- and refugee-serving community-based organizations (CBOs) are the sole providers of cash and food assistance to the many immigrant families ineligible for unemployment assistance and SNAP. *We urge the state to increase response capacity by directing funds to our hardest-hit families through trusted CBOs partnered with community foundations throughout the Commonwealth.*

## **Stimulus tax credits for immigrant taxpayers**

The federal CARES Act excluded immigrant taxpayers who filed using an Individual Tax Identification Number (ITIN), as well as U.S. citizens and noncitizens who would otherwise qualify but filed jointly with an ITIN holder – and their dependent children. *We urge the Legislature to support a one-time state stimulus tax credit for these taxpayers, as provided in S.2659 (Eldridge) and HD.5036 (Barber, Farley-Bouvier).*

## **State assistance to small landlords and their tenants**

Despite new protections against evictions and foreclosures, immigrant tenants who have lost jobs will be unable to make rent payments once the state of emergency ends. The Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) program directs missed rent payments to landlords. *We urge scaling up RAFT by broadening eligibility, streamlining access, and allocating \$50 million in an emergency supplemental budget.*

## **Paid emergency sick leave & worker safety**

Massachusetts' sick leave law is too limited to meet workers' needs in the COVID-19 pandemic, and federal legislation that provides broader coverage excludes an estimated 1.8 million workers. *We urge legislators to pass Paid Emergency Sick Leave legislation HD.5039 (Donato) and SD.2918 (Lewis) to protect workers and enable them to care for their families, and also to mandate health and safety protocols for all workers in "essential" industries, especially our state's 20,000 agricultural workers.*

## **Safe Communities Act & Work and Family Mobility Act**

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically highlighted the human cost of excluding immigrants from basic protections and tools for survival. More than ever, immigrants working in frontline industries urgently need access to driver's licenses to travel safely and secure food, testing and treatment. Especially now, immigrants must be able to freely seek medical care and court or police protection without fear of deportation.

**Massachusetts must take a stand for immigrants and pass these two bills this session.**

## **FY2021 Budget Priorities**

Revenues will fall dramatically short this year, and funding an inclusive state response to COVID19 is our top priority. But the pandemic calls for increased support for outreach and services to immigrant survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. *We support a \$5.3 million increase of line item 4513-1130 to meet expanded needs of victims and survivors during this pandemic.* Looking towards the recovery, we also recommend continued support for key immigrant integration programs, including DTA's Employment Support Services Program, adult English classes (ABE/ESOL), and citizenship programs (CNAIP).