

Support Pro-Immigrant Legislation in 2019–2020!

Massachusetts takes pride in its values, diversity and inclusiveness. The new legislative session offers many opportunities to put those ideals into practice. At a time of enormous uncertainty and fear within immigrant communities, we have identified five bills as MIRA's top priorities:

1. H.3573 and S.1401 – The Safe Communities Act, sponsored by Reps. Ruth Balser and Liz Miranda in the House, and by Sen. Jamie Eldridge in the Senate. This new, streamlined version of the Safe Communities Act would limit state and local participation in federal immigration matters in order to restore community confidence in police, protect basic due process rights, and ensure that police resources are used to fight crime, not separate families.

2. H.1368 – An Act relative to enforcing federal law, sponsored by Rep. Antonio Cabral, bars the use of state resources for 287(g) agreements with Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE), which enable state and county law enforcement personnel to act as federal immigration agents, at state taxpayers' expense. Massachusetts is the only New England state with 287(g) contracts – the most extreme form of entanglement with ICE. The Safe Communities Act has a similar provision.

3. H.3012 and S.2061 – The Work and Family Mobility Act, sponsored by Reps. Tricia Farley-Bouvier and Christine Barber in the House, and by Sen. Brendan Crighton in the Senate. The Commonwealth has two types of driver's license: a REAL ID-compliant license and a standard license. This bill would make Massachusetts standard driver's licenses available to all qualified state residents, regardless of immigration status. Roughly 1 in 6 immigrants in Massachusetts is undocumented, and many find it impossible to meet their families' basic needs without driving. This bill ensures that all drivers are trained, licensed and insured, and removes unlicensed driving as a key entry point to the deportation pipeline. Twelve REAL ID-compliant states, including Connecticut and Vermont, already issue licenses to all qualified residents.

4. H.1952 and S.1292 – An Act to increase health access in underserved areas of Massachusetts, sponsored by Rep. Jack Lewis in the House and Sen. Jason Lewis in the Senate, would establish a commission bringing government, boards of registration of medicine, teaching hospitals, universities, colleges, and direct stakeholders together to investigate ways to reduce licensing and other entry barriers for immigrant and refugee medical professionals, in exchange for providing culturally and linguistically appropriate care in rural and underserved areas of the state.

5. H.162 and S.677 – An Act to ensure equitable coverage for children, sponsored by Rep. Rogers and Sen. DiDomenico, respectively. Kids are kids, no matter where they were born – and we want them all to be safe and healthy. Yet over 20,000 Massachusetts children get only minimal health coverage because of their immigration status. This bill would ensure that MassHealth covers *all* children equitably.

MIRA also supports these important bills:

H.1608 and S.1053 – Resolve fostering greater opportunities for skilled immigrants, sponsored by Rep. Mindy Domb and Sen. Jo Comerford. This bill would establish a special commission to evaluate the barriers to licensure for foreign-trained professionals and recommend ways to remove those barriers, so our Commonwealth can fully benefit from their skills and talent.

H.1239 and S.740 – The Higher Ed Equity Act, sponsored by Rep. Denise Provost in the House and Sen. Sonia Chang-Díaz in the Senate, would ensure that all state residents who graduate from Massachusetts high schools have access to in-state tuition and state financial aid, regardless of immigration status. Two related bills, **H.1236**, sponsored by Rep. Michael Moran, and **S.739**, sponsored by Sen. Harriette Chandler, would also expand access to in-state tuition. This legislation could be life-changing for thousands of young people; it is especially urgent right now because thousands of students with Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and DACA could lose their status – and thus their eligibility for in-state tuition – as soon as this year.

H.1610 and S.1066 – An Act to prevent wage theft and promote employer accountability, sponsored by Rep. Daniel Donahue in the House and Sen. Sal DiDomenico in the Senate, would update labor laws to ensure that subcontracting or outsourcing labor practices do not lead to wage theft and dangerous working conditions. Immigrants are particularly vulnerable to such exploitation, particularly in the current climate.

H.3414 and S.995 – An Act promoting safety for victims of violent crime and human trafficking, sponsored by Reps. Tram Nguyen and Patricia Haddad in the House and Sen. Mark Montigny in the Senate, would streamline the U-visa process for immigrant victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, trafficking, and other violent crimes. U-visas can provide legal protections to victims who have suffered substantial mental or physical harm and help law enforcement to investigate and prosecute violent crimes. This bill clarifies eligibility rules and streamlines the procedures for certification, in accordance with existing federal law.

H.2681 – The Data Equity bill, sponsored by Rep. Tackey Chan, requires state agencies to change the way they collect and organize data. Instead of collecting data by broad racial category, as now, data would be disaggregated by ethnic group to highlight significant differences in health, education, and other markers of community well-being, allowing better allocation of resources where they are most needed.

H.3445 – An Act relative to Caregiver Authorization Affidavits, sponsored by Reps. Denise Provost and Jonathan Hecht, would update the law on appointing temporary caregivers for children to better meet the needs of parents who are unable to care for their children for some periods. The goal is to help ensure stability and continuity of care. This bill would benefit families facing a wide range of crises, including serious illness or addiction, but also immigrants who are detained by ICE and/or face deportation proceedings, many of whom have U.S. citizen children.