

93



**MASSACHUSETTS IMMIGRANT & REFUGEE ADVOCACY COALITION**

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March 25, 1998

Paul R. Haley, Chairman  
House Committee on Ways and Means  
State House; Room 243  
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chairman Haley:

As the Massachusetts House of Representatives prepares the FY 1999 budget, we wanted to take the opportunity to thank you, once again, for the important protections put in place for legal immigrants in last year's budget and in the subsequent supplemental budget directives that will retain their value in the wake of the partial restoration of SSI at the federal level.

As you know, the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 restored SSI to the majority of individuals previously slated to lose benefits last August. Unfortunately, the restoration did not completely reverse the policy directives of the 1996 welfare reform law. While most elder and disabled Massachusetts immigrants will continue to access SSI, nearly all legal immigrants, including families with young children, have been denied access to the federal Food Stamps program.

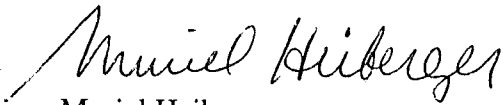
As we have expressed to you in our earlier meetings, we believe that the needs of these hungry legal immigrants, like the needs that necessitate cash assistance to elderly and disabled legal immigrants, must ultimately be resolved at the federal level. We remain committed to working with you and others towards that goal and to taking that message to Washington during the current session of Congress. Many of us have just returned from Washington where we are deeply engaged in this effort.

Moreover, our unfinished work at the federal level demonstrates that unfortunately, legal immigrants remain at risk for losing federal benefits if they have not yet naturalized. You and your leadership team understood this when you authorized, in last year's budget, the expenditure of \$2 million to help Massachusetts low-income legal immigrants in receipt of state benefits become citizens. With these funds, it is estimated that nearly 100 community-based organizations from across the state will provide citizenship assistance services to about 5,000 eligible participants in FY 1998. Were the language of this citizenship program amended to permit participation by all low-income, legal immigrants in the Commonwealth, many more people could be served with the same level of annual funding that was authorized last year.

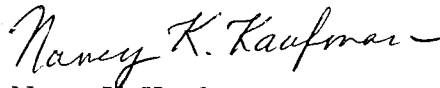
We would very much like the opportunity to meet directly with you to brief you on our efforts at the federal level and to discuss ways to ensure that basic needs of the Commonwealth's immigrant community do not go unmet next year.

We continue to remain grateful for the unprecedented leadership you have shown on these issues and look forward to a meeting with you shortly.

Sincerely,



Muriel Heiberger  
Executive Director  
Massachusetts Immigrant and  
Refugee Advocacy Coalition



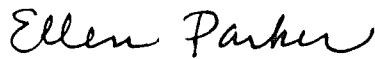
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