



# State Recommendations for Improving Support of Immigrant Families

FEBRUARY 10, 2020 — ROSARIO QUIROZ VILLARREAL

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There are many concrete policy actions states can take to support immigrant families now, regardless of immigration status. Below is a list of the most important policies for states to consider, broken down into the categories of education, health care, livelihood, safety, and equity.

To improve education for immigrant families, states must do the following:

- **Develop a diverse multilingual educator workforce by broadening teacher pipelines**, including by offering tuition assistance to high school English learners (ELs) and former ELs who want to become bilingual educators, and by prioritizing pathways to teacher certification and financial support for the local community members who are already supporting schools as paraprofessionals or parent mentors.
- **Require that all school personnel receive preparation and professional development that equips them to serve the children of immigrants**, including on language acquisition and development, trauma-informed teaching practices with an immigrant lens, the rights of immigrant students and families in schools, and how to engage with students and families from an asset-based perspective.
- **Dismantle the barriers to higher education for undocumented youth** by implementing tuition equity at state universities and allocating funds for in-state financial aid and state loan programs so that students and families can pay for a higher education.
- **Ensure high school educators and guidance counselors can support all students, including immigrant students, in their transition to higher education** by requiring professional training on how to enroll in, finance, and navigate higher education for undocumented youth, the children of undocumented immigrants, and first-generation students.
- **Expand economic mobility by removing barriers to professional licensure and certification across careers to all qualified applicants** by removing citizenship, lawful presence, and social security number requirements in state law.
- **COVID-19 pandemic response: Prioritize and protect funding for English learners and children of immigrant backgrounds** by providing clear guidance to districts on the expenditure of related emergency funding to support these students.

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This report can be found online at: <https://thenext100.org/project/embracing-our-strength/>

To improve health care for immigrant families, states must do the following:

- **Make state-subsidized health care coverage, including both physical and mental health support, accessible to every adult and child** by ensuring eligibility does not require a social security number or a predetermined length of time in the United States, and that affordable premiums are offered on a sliding scale aligned with household income and local cost of living.
- **Require that health care providers receive training on effectively serving immigrant communities**, including on how to address barriers to health care for immigrant communities, engage effectively with immigrant communities, and understand the health care services and programs individuals can access regardless of immigration status.
- **COVID-19 pandemic response: Mandate that any COVID-19 related illness or condition be covered under emergency Medicaid, and take affirmative steps to ensure the COVID-19 vaccines are accessible to all** by not requiring proof of identity or asking for a social security number at any point in booking appointments, or if proof is required, accepting a variety of easily accessible documents to prove identity; and ensure language accessibility in each of the state's major represented languages across all outreach and appointment booking strategies and modalities.

To improve livelihood for immigrant families, states must do the following:

- **Protect all workers from workplace discrimination and wage theft** by implementing stronger legal protections, stricter penalties, and increased enforcement capacity against workplace violations; funding worker centers and community organizations to conduct worker rights training; and requiring employers to participate in training on the rights of all workers regardless of immigration status.

**licenses and state and local identifications that do not require a social security number** for eligibility. These state identifications should include privacy provisions to protect applicant information from being sold to outside entities or shared across government agencies without court subpoenas or judicial warrants.

- **Support expanded access to financial and banking services for individuals** by requiring banks to accept any form of state identification and individual taxpayer identification numbers (ITIN) when opening bank accounts; making policies clear and accessible, including linguistically accessible, for immigrant communities; and creating lending programs that allow borrowers to use ITINs for students and families seeking college loans or home mortgages.
- **Remove requirements that mandate employer use of E-Verify** and limit voluntary employer use of the program.
- **COVID-19 pandemic response: Ensure all workers receive financial relief** by ensuring state pandemic relief programs, state earned income tax credits, and emergency economic support do not require a social security number for eligibility, and by creating excluded worker relief funds to address gaps in unemployment insurance.

To improve safety for immigrant families, states must do the following:

- **Create universal legal representation programs** that partner with and leverage existing immigrant-serving organizations, university-based legal clinics, and other community resources to ensure immigrants residing in the state have access to a lawyer in immigration courts, including when the immigration court is in another state.
- **Prohibit local law enforcement from partnering with federal immigration enforcement entities** by issuing directives or passing legislation that limits the sharing of data between law enforcement and immigration

enforcement, forbids law enforcement from honoring ICE detainers, bans ICE from interrogating people held in jails, prohibits law enforcement from asking about immigration status, and ends local 287(g) agreements.

- **Ensure misdemeanor sentencing laws do not result in disparate punishment for immigrants** by limiting misdemeanor sentencing to 364 days or less.
- **COVID-19 pandemic response: Slow the spread of the virus in detention facilities** by issuing a moratorium on ICE transfers and requiring local law enforcement to reject ICE detainer requests and release people to their homes and families.

Ultimately, we must consistently craft more inclusive policy. States can ensure equity-driven policy that protects immigrant potential by doing the following:

- **Establish a formal, state-level office for immigrant priorities**, tasked with offering recommendations for protecting immigrants, centralizing efforts for policy implementation, ensuring policies meant to serve immigrants are implemented correctly and tracked to evaluate impact, and serving as a vehicle for immigrants to report or address instances of discrimination without fear of retaliation.
- **Equip immigrants to lead policy-making efforts** by partnering with and funding direct-service organizations to ensure diverse immigrant voices are consistently consulted and surveyed when crafting recommendations and reviewing implementation and outreach efforts.
- **Center racial justice by investing in community-based public safety solutions**, disentangling criminal law enforcement from civil immigration law enforcement, and disaggregating misdemeanor and felony sentencing data by race, country of origin, and form of legal representation to

provide a clearer picture on institutional issues disproportionately affecting Black immigrants.

- **Foster an equitable and welcoming environment for all immigrants by publicly uplifting the contributions and impact of immigrant communities**, earmarking funds for outreach to immigrant communities in rural and under-resourced areas throughout the state, and enabling language access by ensuring multilingual resources are available in all major languages represented by populations within the state.

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## Author

**Rosario Quiroz Villarreal** is a policy entrepreneur at Next100 focused on increasing educational equity for immigrant students and students of color, including by removing the systemic barriers their families face when seeking opportunity. Growing up as an undocumented immigrant, Rosario understood that the sacrifices her parents made in moving to a new country were centered around securing better opportunities for the future, and that education could provide a pathway toward a choice-filled life. However, as she got older, she recognized that, while education was certainly filled with opportunities, particular populations were constantly excluded.