

## INVESTING IN MASSACHUSETTS IMMIGRANTS

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IMMIGRANTS PLAY A CRITICAL ROLE IN THE MASSACHUSETTS ECONOMY, AND THEIR IMPORTANCE CONTINUES TO GROW. A MASSINC STUDY FOUND THAT IMMIGRANTS MAKE UP NEARLY 30 PERCENT OF THE MASSACHUSETTS POPULATION AND WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR MORE THAN 80 PERCENT OF THE INCREASE IN THE LABOR FORCE FROM THE MID-1980S TO THE LATE 1990S. THE STUDY ALSO FOUND THAT IMMIGRANTS EARN LESS THAN NATIVE-BORN WORKERS, LARGELY BECAUSE THEY ARE MORE LIKELY TO HAVE A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA OR LESS.

Immigrants can play an even greater role in driving economic growth that will ensure a prosperous future for Massachusetts, but only if we invest in the future by helping them develop the skills necessary in the state's knowledge-based economy. This is a win-win situation: What is good for immigrants is also good for the Commonwealth. Helping immigrants develop the skills necessary for jobs that can support a family will also ensure that employers have the highly skilled labor force they need.

As we all know, Massachusetts is an expensive place to live. Housing and health care costs are among the highest in the nation. The Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Standard, a sophisticated measure of what it really costs to meet the basic needs of a family, shows that a family

of four living in Boston needs to earn \$42,564 a year just to make ends meet. In today's economy, education and training beyond high school are necessary.

Immigrants face particular challenges in making the transition from low-wage work to family-supporting careers. By addressing the barriers that immigrants face, Governor-elect Mitt Romney has a unique opportunity to strengthen the Massachusetts economy for years to come. This requires the foresight to invest in the future during today's economic downturn so that employers will have the skilled workers they need when the economy rebounds.

The Citizenship Assistance Program, a national model for helping immigrants become valuable contributors to their new home, should be restored in the next budget. This is a proven way to provide an opportunity for low-income immigrants to learn English, the first step in developing skills that lead to self-sufficiency, and to becoming citizens.

There is also a critical need to improve and expand English as a Second Language programs for adults and to link them directly to work force development and employment. Like several other states, Massachusetts should promote long-term prosperity by allowing education and job training to count toward welfare work requirements. There is no better way to help welfare recipients support their families, develop the

skills employers' need, and stay off welfare permanently.

Massachusetts should also restore the shortsighted cuts in food stamps and state cash assistance for legal immigrants, especially in today's slow economy. Like other low-income residents, immigrants need transitional assistance to get on their feet and develop the skills necessary to support their families and make important contributions to the state's economy.

We must also preserve health care coverage for immigrant families and low-wage workers in Massachusetts. Without it, they are more likely to use costly emergency rooms and their children

are less likely to get preventive care. Study after study show that this is a far more costly and less effective way to provide health care, and that medical emergencies are a major reason why former welfare recipients leave their jobs.

Working to ensure that all Massachusetts residents are able to support their families and provide them with food, shelter, and adequate medical care should be a priority for the next administration. It is also the best way to ensure the skilled labor force that Massachusetts will need far into the future. It is only then that we can ensure the realization of the American dream of self-sufficiency for all Massachusetts residents and the growth of a strong economy.

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