

Restore the DSHS Naturalization Program

On December 1, 2010, DSHS Naturalization Services funded through the Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance (ORIA) were eliminated as a result of the Governor's October across-the-board budget cuts. The elimination of these core services, which represent nearly 90% of statewide funding for citizenship services, has already decimated local community-based organizations who low-income immigrant communities have come to rely on as their only hope for attaining U.S. citizenship.

We urge the legislature to restore funding for the DSHS Naturalization program at a level that preserves basic infrastructure and services, which in turn provide hope to immigrant families and jobs at community-based organizations that provide the services.

- **The DSHS Naturalization Program is cost-effective.** The DSHS Naturalization Program helps low-income legal permanent residents transition from state-funded to federally-funded benefits through citizenship acquisition. According to the City of Seattle, about 600 elderly and disabled immigrants were naturalized through the program in the city. As a result of their \$1 million investment in the DSHS Naturalization Program, the City saved the state \$1,800,000 in its first year by moving elderly and disabled immigrants from state-funded Disability Lifeline to federally-funded SSI.
- **The DSHS Naturalization Program provides statewide citizenship services infrastructure.** The DSHS Naturalization Program represents nearly 90% of statewide funding for citizenship services. The elimination of the Naturalization Program has decimated citizenship services across the state, resulting in layoffs at local community-based organizations and leaving many large areas of the state without access to any low-cost naturalization support.
- **The DSHS Naturalization Program keeps low-income immigrants from seeking citizenship assistance from "notarios," some of whom take advantage of vulnerable immigrants.** The Attorney General's Office has filed legislation to clamp down on immigration consultants or "notarios," because they are having such a negative impact on the immigration status of many individuals and families. With no free or low-cost citizenship services available in many areas as a result of the cuts, immigrants will increasingly turn to "notarios" as the only available option.
- **The DSHS Naturalization Program provides an array of services that support immigrants in becoming self-sufficient.** Services funded through the Naturalization Program include English language classes, civics classes, and assistance with fee and disability waivers, among others. Without access to these services, many clients will not be able to afford either the application cost (\$675/person) or legal assistance (\$200/hr average) to naturalize.
- **Naturalization increases wages and opens opportunities for employment.** Studies have shown that income increases with naturalization and some jobs are only available to U.S. citizens.

We urge the legislature to restore the DSHS Naturalization Program in the 2011 Supplemental Budget and the 2011-2013 Biennial Budget to continue this cost-effective program that saves the state money, ensure that some basic level of services and infrastructure is maintained and so that low-income immigrants continue to have access to the American Dream of U.S. citizenship.

For more information, please contact:

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