



**Testimony submitted to the
Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities
In Support of H135/S76 An Act Establishing Basic Needs Assistance for Massachusetts
Immigrant Residents
By Palma McLaughlin, LWVMA Specialist on Children and Family Issues
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The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts represents 44 local Leagues across the state, from Cape Cod to the Berkshires. We ask you to support H135/S76 An Act Establishing Basic Needs Assistance for Massachusetts Immigrant Residents (the Act). The Act will restore basic needs assistance to legally present individuals (LPRs), assists immigrant and mixed status households and mixed status communities in Massachusetts.

Despite contributing to Massachusetts communities and economy, many LPRs who have lived in the state for years, including immigrants with Temporary Protected Status, Pending Asylum seekers, DACA/Dreamers, Humanitarian Parole applicants and Victims of Violence, don't qualify for critical cash and nutrition benefits.

Individuals do not operate in a vacuum. They live with family and neighborhoods that share resources and community networks. Passage of the Act will have impact beyond the population specifically targeted.¹²³

Although US citizens in mixed status households (usually children) do qualify for assistance, families often do not apply. Reasons include confusing, contradictory requirements that are difficult for both applicants and administrators to untangle. LPRs face a patchwork of varying eligibility requirements. Significantly, many fear of running afoul of the federal Public Charge rule, described as receipt of government financial assistance, which could mean ineligibility for citizenship or visa revocation.⁴ LWVUS opposed the Public Charge rule. Elimination of barriers will benefit the emerging second generation of US citizens within mixed status families.

Extension of benefits increases the educational attainment for immigrant and native-born youth in high immigrant ethnic groups more broadly. In one study access to benefits increased

¹ Condon, M., Filindra, A. and Wichowsky, A. (2016). Immigrant Inclusion in the Safety Net: A Framework for Analysis and Effects on Educational Attainment. *Policy Studies Journal*, 44(4), 424-448

² Filindra, A., Blanding, D. and Coll, C. G. (2011). The power of context: State-level policies and politics and the educational performance of the children of immigrants in the United States. *Harvard Educational Review*, 81(3), 407-438. NCES 2016117REV. National Center for Education Statistics

³ Hoxby, C. (2000). Peer effects in the classroom: Learning from gender and race variation (No. w7867). National Bureau of Economic Research.

⁴ United States, Department of Homeland Security, "Public Charge Ground of Inadmissibility", 84 Fed. Reg. 55, 472 (Sep. 9, 2022)

community graduation rates by nine points.⁵ US citizen children of immigrant parents also experienced measurable reductions in anxiety.⁶ The restoration of basic needs assistance sends a powerful message of inclusion to families and communities beyond the individual LPR.

One in six Massachusetts residents are foreign born. They are part of our families, our communities, and our economy. Our policies must effectively account for the full human costs of needs and the benefits of assisting our vulnerable residents that can substantially improve life-long and generational outcomes.

Therefore, the League strongly urges you to support the passage and implementation of H135/S76 An Act Establishing Basic Needs Assistance for Massachusetts Immigrant Residents (Feeding Our Neighbors) and to report these bills favorably out of committee in a timely manner.

Thank you for your consideration.

⁵ Barrios, E., and Condon, M. "The immigrant policy context in Illinois: An overview, policy analysis framework and implications for Illinois children." *Illinois Municipal Policy Journal* 2.1 (2017): 85-101.

⁶ Hainmueller, J., Lawrence, D., Martén, L., Black, B., Figueroa, L., Hotard, M., & Laitin, D. D. (2017). Protecting unauthorized immigrant mothers improves their children's mental health. *Science*, 357 (6355), 1041-1044.