



## **The Issue:**

# **IMMIGRATION**

### **Children's Bureau, Inc. Position:**

We advocate for the safety, protection and well being of all children. Children of immigrant parents should be assured health care, essential social services, legal representation, protection from abuse and neglect, and access to education.

## **We support the following Legislative and/or Policy Initiatives:**

- Provide children of immigrants' sufficient access to health care, social services and public education.
- Ensure that abandoned and unaccompanied immigrant children have legal representation in custody and child welfare issues.
- Provide resources to child serving organizations to improve the hiring and retaining of multi-lingual staff.
- Support policies that promote cultural competency trainings in businesses, organizations, and government to ensure the diverse needs of immigrants are addressed in service provision.
- Advocate for fair and just immigration reform that includes protection of undocumented children and their family members and increased enforcement of labor law protections.
- Increase public awareness education on local, state and federal immigration issues that affect children.
- Support policies that promote the economic stability of families.
- Ensure all eligible undocumented, CHINS children apply for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status.
- Increase public awareness of human trafficking and ensure all undocumented children and adults who are victims of a serious crime or human trafficking are provided information to apply for U and T Non-Immigrant Visas.
- Ensure immigration reform policies seek to preserve family integrity for children who are U.S Citizens living in mixed status families.
- Human Service providers should not be held accountable for immigration enforcement and not penalized for carrying out mission driven services.

## **Background Information:**

**A growing population** of immigrants in the United States and Indiana has increased the public's attention and discourse regarding immigration issues. Current federal legislation is working to limit the rights of immigrants and address issues related to undocumented immigrants in the country. It is vital to understand the issues surrounding immigration reform and the immigration experience's impact on children and families. Children of immigrants are the fastest growing segment of the child population in the United States<sup>1</sup>. In 2008, 16.5 million children 17 years old and younger had at least one immigrant parent<sup>1</sup>. Children of immigrants comprise 29 percent of poor children and 30 percent of low income children<sup>1</sup>.

It is estimated that 5 percent (264,000 individuals) of Indiana's residents were born outside the United States<sup>2</sup>. It is estimated that the number of undocumented immigrants in Indiana is about 120,000; however, this figure is difficult to determine due to this population not openly disclosing their immigration status<sup>3</sup>. While 49.4 percent of foreign born Hoosiers are from Latin America, it is important to note that individuals from other regions of the world are immigrating to Indiana<sup>2</sup>. The US Census Bureau determined that 25 percent of foreign born Hoosiers are from Asia, 17.4 percent are from Europe, and the remaining 8.2 percent from Africa and North America<sup>2</sup>.

38.7 percent of immigrant children who are U.S. citizens live in a household with undocumented parents, which is defined as a mixed status family<sup>4</sup>. Mixed immigrant families face several barriers to accessing available resources in their communities. There is a wealth of literature surrounding the lack of utilization of medical services by mixed immigrant families<sup>5</sup>. Children with legal status are eligible for health services, such as Medicaid but many times undocumented family members fear that accessing such services will lead to deportation<sup>5</sup>. Immigrant advocates indicate that often families are unsure of their legal rights and if they do access services, many times there is no bilingual staff at agencies to interpret services for them<sup>5</sup>. Language and cultural barriers can impede families' ability to access available programs that promote positive outcomes for their children. It is imperative that service providers have the available staff and training to adequately address issues related to immigrant families in a culturally responsive way.

In the past couple of years, the federal government has begun to use workplace raids to locate undocumented workers across the country. These raids have resulted in hundreds of children being separated from one or both parents, which have been shown to lead to economic hardship and psychological trauma<sup>6</sup>. It was found by the Urban Institute that on average the number of children impacted during workplace raids is about half the number of adults who were arrested<sup>6</sup>. The majority of these children are under the age of 6 and are U.S. citizens<sup>6</sup>. The immediate impact of these raids have been the need for local community organizations and schools to come together and ensure all children are safe and have basic necessities<sup>6</sup>. The longer term effects of being separated from a parent are mental health concerns, such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and depression, and economic challenges due to the loss of a wage earner in the family<sup>6</sup>.

Children of immigrant families traveling to the United States often face harsh conditions, exposure to violent traffickers, or even loss of family members<sup>7</sup>. Children who enter the country unaccompanied by a parent are held in punitive detention centers for up to several months<sup>7</sup>. With no right to legal representation in court hearings, children are many times deported back to their country of origin without reason<sup>7</sup>. In Canada, children are assigned a guardian in order to establish a permanency plan<sup>7</sup>. Guardians (case workers) look out for the best interest of the child and make sure that they are not held in detention centers while they await placement or reunification<sup>7</sup>. Due to the various reasons for a family to immigrate to the United States and the potential traumatic experiences involved with the process of immigrating, it is critical that support services are provided for these families and children to deal with mental health and coping issues.

Numerous hurdles exist that impede an individuals' ability to achieve legal status. However, various outlets exist to assist individuals in obtaining legal status if they have been a victim of a violent crime. Children and adults who have experienced serious crime, such as domestic violence, abuse and/or neglect, etc., can obtain a U Non-Immigrant Visa if they cooperate with the investigation<sup>8</sup>. Undocumented children who have been identified as CHINS can be eligible to receive Special Immigrant Juvenile Status to achieve legal status<sup>8</sup>.

It is critical that caseworkers are aware of this program to ensure undocumented children can obtain legal status and access available resources in the community.

The Justice Department has identified that Central Indiana is an area at risk for human trafficking, which is a situation where an individual is forced into a slave like labor situation<sup>9</sup>. It is estimated that every year, 18,000 to 20,000 men, women and children are being trafficked in the United States<sup>9</sup>. These individuals are often smuggled into the country from impoverished situations and exploited for labor and prostitution<sup>9</sup>. Efforts need to be implemented to raise the awareness of this issue and attempt to identify victims and hold traffickers responsible. Victims also need to be made aware of their rights and educated about the T-Visa program, which is an avenue to obtain legal status in the United States.

One of the current concerns in the United States and Indiana has been that undocumented immigrants have been utilizing services and benefits paid for through tax dollars. The fact is that the majority of working immigrants pay taxes. In 2002, undocumented immigrants' earnings were estimated to be \$56 billion<sup>10</sup>. These earnings generated between \$6 to \$7 billion in Social Security revenue and about \$1.5 billion in Medicare revenue<sup>10</sup>. Many of the benefits funded through these contributions do not provide assistance to undocumented immigrants due to eligibility guidelines. This serves as an example that dispels the myth that undocumented immigrants are draining government resources as it relates to public benefits.

### **CBI Program Impact and Participation:**

Children's Bureau's prevention and community based programs serve immigrant children and their families. Family Preservation and Community Partners are the primary programs impacted by these issues. Children's Bureau is dedicated to providing culturally responsive and bilingual services to immigrants and their families. In 2010, 4.8% of the clients served by CBI were Hispanic.

### **For More Information Contact:**

#### **Children's Bureau, Inc.**

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**<http://www.childrensbureau.org/corp/adv/index.php>**

<sup>1</sup> Urban Institute. (2010). *Children of Immigrants Drive the Increase in America's Youth Population, but Almost Half Live in Low-Income Families*. Retrieved from, <http://www.urban.org/publications/901382.html>

<sup>2</sup> Indiana Business Research Center. (2009). *The latest on Indiana's foreign-born population*. Retrieved from, <http://www.incontext.indiana.edu/2009/sept-oct/article3.asp>

<sup>3</sup> Evansville Courier Press. (2010, September 12). *Indiana bucks national trend on illegal immigrants*. Retrieved from, <http://www.courierpress.com/news/2010/sep/12/state-bucks-illegal-trend/>

<sup>4</sup> Urban Institute. (2011). *The urban institute children of immigrants data tool*.

<sup>5</sup> Child Welfare League of America. (2006). *Prescription for disaster*. Retrieved from, <http://www.cwla.org/voice/0605healthcare.htm>

<sup>6</sup> The Urban Institute. (2007). *Paying the price: The impact of immigration raids on america's children*. Retrieved from, <http://www.urban.org/publications/411566.html>

<sup>7</sup> American Immigration Law Foundation. (2006). *Crossing borders alone: The treatment of unaccompanied children in the United States*. Retrieved from, <http://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/docs/Brief13%20-%20Crossing%20Border%20Alone.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Jackson, K. (2007). *Juvenile immigration 101*. Retrieved from, <http://www.f2f.ca.gov/res/pdf/JuvenileImmigration101.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Neighborhood Christian Legal Clinic. (2007). *Human trafficking T-Visa*.

<sup>10</sup> New York Times. (2005). *Illegal immigrants are bolstering social security with billions*. Retrieved from, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/05/business/05immigration.html?ex=1270353600&en=78c87ac4641dc383&ei=5090>