



Task Force on **New Americans**



Message from Assemblyman Marcos A. Crespo

Today, our nation continues to be deeply divided on how to address current immigration problems and which reforms to implement.

Inaction by leaders of the House of Representatives, delayed action by the President, and ad hoc policy initiatives

by states have all created uncertainty as to the direction of any immigration reform.

Caught in the politics of this issue are hundreds of thousands of families who have been torn apart by deportations and thousands of children who are now in the federal foster care system after their parents were deported.

To compound this problem, tens of thousands of children have been crossing our southern border unaccompanied by adults. It is estimated that in 2014 alone, over 90,000 children will be apprehended by federal agents guarding the US-Mexico border. These children are now being placed in federal detention centers and are later released to host families or their nearest relative in the United States.

I have visited one such detention center and have spoken to these children. The majority of them have been victims of sexual assault and traumatized by their journey to reach the United States as they escaped the violence in their homelands.

Earlier this year, the Obama Administration surpassed the troubling 2 million deportations marker. Hispanic members of Congress have recently outlined administrative actions the President can and should take.

The rhetoric and stigmas created by the national debate on immigration reform have created a hostile environment for ethnic minorities across our nation and have contributed to bias-related crimes with deadly outcomes right here in our own state.

At this moment in our State and national history when immigrants and immigration are vilified, there need to be strong voices to remind New Yorkers that immigrants and immigration are positive forces shaping our country.

I have been trying to be one of those voices since Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver appointed me to be Chair of the Assembly Task Force on New Americans. The work of the Task Force could not be made possible without the support and leadership of Speaker Silver. From making the New York Dream Act a priority to ensuring funding for a variety of programs vital to helping immigrants integrate into our society, the Speaker is a forceful ally. In this newsletter, I have outlined some of the issues that have been addressed to help improve the lives of immigrants and their families.



FACTS & FIGURES

- In New York, immigrants contribute almost a quarter of the Gross State Product, which in total stands at over \$1.2 trillion dollars annually.
- It is the growth in immigrant communities that prevented our State from losing more than two Congressional seats after the 2010 Census.
- It is immigration that has fueled the small business growth of our communities and which currently employs over 330,000 New Yorkers.
- Immigrants comprise 27% of our State's workforce and foreign students add \$2.6 billion annually to our state's economy.
- Simply put, take immigrants out of the equation and New York's economy would be in a worse state of affairs.
- More information on economic impact of immigrants can be found at <http://assembly.state.ny.us/comm/NewAmer/20140103/index.pdf>



Assemblyman Marcos A. Crespo, Chair of the Task Force on New Americans, and Senate Majority Coalition Leader Jeff Klein discuss the importance of protecting immigrants from immigrant assistance service fraud. Senator Klein made passage of the bill in the Senate possible in 2013 and again this year. This legislation is the most comprehensive, pro-immigrant legislation passed in New York in over a half a century and impacts more than 4.2 million New Yorkers of foreign decent.

Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver has prioritized the New York Dream Act by having the bill voted on early in the 2013 and 2014 Legislative Sessions. While the bill passed twice in the Assembly, unfortunately vacant seats in the Senate due to resignations and the absence of special elections to fill those seats lead to the bill not passing in that chamber.

Task Force on New Americans

Focusing on Immigrant Health:

After being named chair of the Assembly Task Force on New Americans late last year by Speaker Sheldon Silver, I moved quickly to voice strong concern on faulty public policies that have negative impacts on our immigrant communities.

In collaboration and with support of Assembly Health Committee Chair Richard Gottfried and Assembly Insurance Committee Chair Kevin A. Cahill, I held a hearing in September 2013 to ascertain the process by which the health insurance for immigrants through the New York Health Exchange was being handled.

- The outcome showed that the NYS Department of Health (DOH) has still not produced the adequate policies and practices to reach out to and enroll immigrant communities and those with limited English proficiency. In fact, even after the Health Exchange opened for business and months after, DOH has not launched a website to address access by language minorities. Recent data also show lower enrollment rates for racial and ethnic minorities, the same groups that have the highest rates of being uninsured.

More information on this issue can be found at <http://assembly.state.ny.us/comm/NewAmer/20140311/index.pdf> and at <http://assembly.state.ny.us/comm/Health/20130906/>

Focusing on Adult English Language Classes:

In October 2013, I held a statewide forum on Adult English Language Classes to determine adequate funding levels and demand for such classes.

- The outcome showed that at a time when there are more immigrants in New York than ever before, State funding for Adult English Language classes will be cut by 20% for each of the next four years. Data obtained by my office also show a decrease in funding for these classes in the New York City area and an increase in funding in Upstate communities. This has happened even though the bulk of the population growth of immigrant communities has been in the New York City area. In addition, there continues to be strong unmet demand for English language classes with those interested in learning English unable to find classes or being placed on long waiting lists.

More information on the statewide forum can be found at <http://assembly.state.ny.us/comm/NewAmer/20131014/index.pdf>

Focusing on Language Services in Hospitals

I reviewed Medicaid reimbursement rates for hospital translation services and how they impact quality of health for immigrants.

- The outcome showed that the State has set translation reimbursement rates so low that quality translation services are still unavailable at many health facilities. This is an area that needs further review by the Task Force on New Americans because adequate health care cannot be delivered if there are communication barriers between patients and health care staff.

More information including a fact sheet and maps that highlight this issue can be found at <http://assembly.state.ny.us/comm/?sec=post&id=83>

Focusing on Immigrants and High Smoking Rates

In December of 2013 I was joined by major disease prevention groups and leading immigrant advocacy organizations to call on NYS to use the federal Tobacco Settlement funding in the way it was intended: to fight tobacco use. Smoking rates in immigrant communities are substantially higher than the general population and smoking related illnesses are over-represented in these communities.

The latest research by Dr. Simona Kwon, assistant professor and director of the NYU Center for the Study of Asian American Health, tells us that 11% of all Asians in NYC reported smoking, however, smoking rates differ significantly by Asian subgroup – for example -- 23% of Koreans reported smoking (36% among males and 11% among females), and 11% of Chinese reported smoking (18% among males and 4% among females). NYU researchers also uncovered that along with gender differences, differences were also found

for nativity. Foreign-born males reported higher rates of smoking compared to their U.S. born counterparts (20% vs 11%).

New York State has only used a small percentage (16%) of the millions it gets yearly to fight smoking and to fund smoking reduction programs. Those programs are absent from minority communities as are anti-smoking media campaigns. Given that the state receives over \$2 billion in tobacco revenues annually, anti-smoking groups and service providers believe adequate revenues are readily available to beat this deadly addiction.

In 2009, 24,400 lives were prematurely lost due to tobacco use in New York, while tobacco cost New Yorkers an estimated \$8.17 billion in health care costs, including \$2.7 billion in Medicaid expenditures by state and local governments.

More information can be found at <http://assembly.state.ny.us/mem/Marcos-A-Crespo/story/56686/>

Focusing on Education and New Americans

• The Dream Act:

I continue to be a strong advocate for the New York Dream Act which will provide children brought into the United States with affordable options for college. In a highly competitive global economy, we must not overlook the huge pool of talent these children bring to our country and a college education must be within their reach. The Assembly passed the Dream Act in 2013 and 2014. Unfortunately a combination of factors prevented enough votes to support passage in the Senate, including an empty Senate seat because a special election to fill that vacancy has not been scheduled.

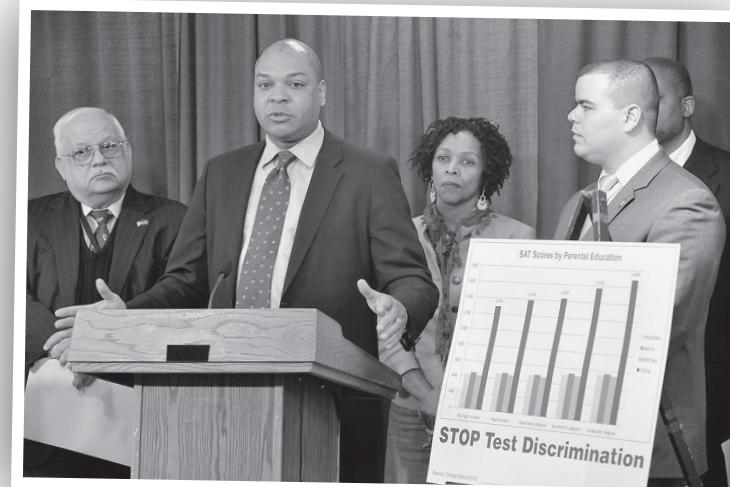
More information on this issue can be found at <http://assembly.state.ny.us/comm/NewAmer/20130701/index.pdf>

• English Language Learners

New York State has a high school graduation rate of 74%. Thirty one states have higher graduation rates than us. But these numbers fail to show the crisis of the situation for English language learners who are dropping out of school at alarmingly high rates.

About 34% of ELL students graduate high school, an overall drop of 4% from 2012. There are over 214,000 ELL students in New York, speaking over 160 different languages.

This crisis was created by years of neglect due to the marginalization of this special population. Today, based on the huge number of students that are impacted, there is a critical mass of failure that has been reached which threatens the future fiscal stability of our State.



Assemblyman Marcos A. Crespo and Assemblyman Karim Camara, Chair of the New York State Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic and Asian Legislative Caucus unveil legislation to ban the use of high stakes test like the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA).



Assemblyman Marcos A. Crespo is joined by New York Immigration Coalition Executive Director Steven Choi as he speaks to a standing-room-only event in Albany hosted by the Coalition and highlights his work and agenda as Task Force Chair.



A delegation of Asian Americans visited with Assembly members Marcos Crespo, David I. Weprin, Ron Kim and David Buchwald to advocate for issues important to their diverse communities. Here they take a photograph outside the Assembly Chamber in Albany, New York.

Focusing on Education Continued

The Task Force on New Americans strongly supports recommendations given to the State Department of Education to strengthen ELL programs and improve outcomes for students. In addition, I sponsored legislation that will allow parents, in consultation with teachers, to request that their child receive an additional year of English language instruction prior to being placed in regular classes.

More information on this can be found at <http://assembly.state.ny.us/comm/NewAmer/20140611/index.pdf> and at <http://assembly.state.ny.us/leg/?bn=A09568>

• Preventing Roadblocks to Employment after College

Immigrants and their children who have earned a college education should not face roadblocks that prevent them from finding jobs after college graduation. But this is exactly what is starting to take shape under a plan by private and public colleges to give a college exit exam. That grade can be requested by employers as a tool to measure job readiness. For hundreds of thousands of English language learners in New York, these tests are unfair and will create economic hardships. That is why I have introduced legislation banning such exams and have organized a group of civil rights leaders to fight the plan. Early this year, I unveiled my proposed law at a press event.

I denounced the push to establish a college exit exam that's being marketed as a screening tool for employers, calling such tests dangerous and discriminatory. My legislation will ban the exam known as the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), but allow its confidential use by colleges if it's only used to improve student academic attainment.

Created by the Council for Aid to Education (CAE), a group linked to the conservative and right-wing RAND Corporation, the CLA has been creeping its way into select New York public and private colleges. But the plan is to have the State's more than one million college students take the exam throughout their attendance at institutions of higher learning.

The exam creates a life-long college "credit score" that will impair the ability of countless college graduates from obtaining a job because the exam results will be used to gauge workforce readiness. High stakes exams have a detrimental impact on low income, minority and immigrant students while benefiting students from high income and college educated families.

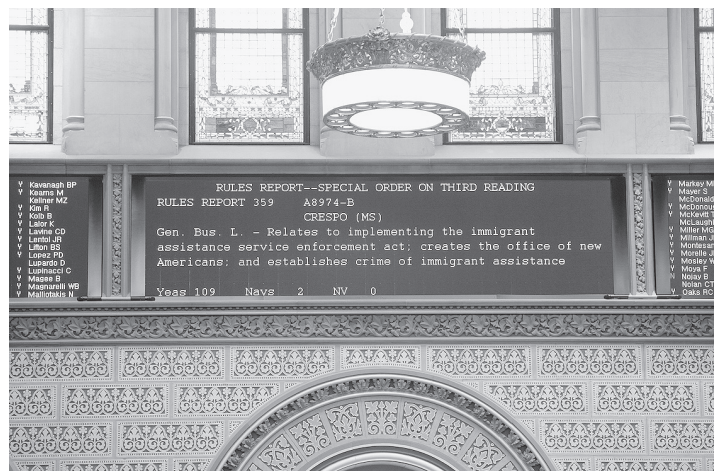
New York State ranks an embarrassing 41st in SAT scores compared to other states, 82% of students in the City University of New York (CUNY) community colleges need remedial classes and less than 40% of Black and Latino students in the State University of New York (SUNY) graduate in four years. "There is a correlation between SAT performance and CLA grade. The use of this college exit exam score spells disaster for college students in our State."

More information on this issue can be found at <http://assembly.state.ny.us/comm/?sec=post&id=083&story=57619>

• Protecting Farmworkers

Fifty-five years ago, President Harry Truman stated he believed that migrant farm workers should be paid the prevailing wage. Today the NYS Farm Workers Bill of Rights remains unfinished business and immigrant and migrant farmworkers continue to be exploited and underpaid for their hard labor.

The politics and policy of who controls immigrants, this valuable human resource, is a classic struggle in American politics. It shapes domestic labor markets from the very high-skilled to those harvesting our food. It shapes which businesses have access to subsidized and cheap labor. It takes into account the financial gains of using such labor while simultaneously creating a tier of second class workers not covered under existing labor laws.



The vote tally as the New York State Assembly passes the most comprehensive pro-immigrant protection legislation in over half a century that also establishes the New York State Office for New Americans in law. Both houses of the State Legislature have passed the bill sponsored by Assemblyman Crespo. The bill was negotiated with Governor Cuomo's top staff and will be signed later this year.

The New York State Assembly continues to pass the Farmworkers Bill of Rights but support for this important legislation is needed from the Governor and the Senate.

More information on this issue can be found at http://assembly.state.ny.us/leg/?default_fld=&bn=A01792&term=&Summary=Y&Actions=Y

• Protecting Immigrants from Immigration Services Fraud

A major step in protecting immigrants from fraud was taken when both houses passed legislation that increases penalties to deter such crimes, provides victims with recourse for damage and compensation, and permanently creates the New York State Office for New Americans. This major piece of legislation I sponsored was made possible by months of negotiations between my staff, immigrant advocacy groups led by the New York Immigration Coalition and the Governor's Office. The leadership of Senate Majority Coalition Leader Jeff Klein allowed the legislation to pass the Senate and it is expected the Governor will sign the bill later in 2014.

With over 2 million non-citizen residents and another 2.1 million naturalized US citizens living in New York, the anti-fraud measures will provide crucial protections to millions of New Yorkers.

Recently a sweep by federal and New York City law enforcement agencies found over 220 immigration service providers operating outside the limits of the law and issued over \$288,000 in fines. Surveys on this type of fraud in other major US cities have found that over 40% of immigration assistance services operations are fraudulent. Many immigrants looking for assistance with federal immigration matters have been defrauded and have lost their life savings trying to navigate our immigration system.

More information on this issue can be found at http://assembly.state.ny.us/leg/?default_fld=%0D%0A&bn=A8974&term=&Summary=Y&Actions=Y

• Focus on other major issues impacting immigrants

While this newsletter is an overview of some of the key initiatives of the Task Force on New Americans, it is understood that more work needs to be done to remedy the problems highlighted. Other issues of concern to be discussed in the annual report of the Task Force due out later this year include the push for providing driver licenses for undocumented immigrants, helping immigrant communities access banking services, bringing state resources to the plight of thousands of unaccompanied youth crossing into the US and being housed in New York State, and continued review into how the New York Health Benefit Exchange is serving language minorities.



Task Force on **New Americans**

To be included on the email list of groups, organizations and individuals interested in updates on the work of the Assembly Task Force on New Americans, email Assemblyman Crespo's Legislative Director Guillermo A. Martinez at martinezg@assembly.state.ny.us with the words **Subscribe to TF News** in the subject line.