

Immigrants Rally to Support 3 Bills

The Washington Post

February 27, 2007 Tuesday, Final Edition

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Section: Metro; B03

Length: 551 words

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Body

More than 1,200 Latino and Asian immigrants and their advocates took to the State House last night to press Maryland lawmakers to expand their rights and fight legislation they say would take them away.

The rally, coordinated by CASA of Maryland, drew many day laborers, restaurant workers, housekeepers, nannies and other low-wage earners who could not take time off from their jobs during the day. Organizers said their sixth annual lobby day in Annapolis reflected a sense of urgency over federal efforts to crack down on illegal immigration, although the Maryland General Assembly has historically rejected such legislation.

A handful of bills related to immigration have been proposed in the legislature this year.

Advocates point to an ally in the new Democratic administration. "It was very clear during his campaign that Governor [Martin] O'Malley recognized that one in 10 Marylanders was born in another country," said Kim Propeack, CASA's advocacy director.

Lt. Gov. Anthony G. Brown (D) and his wife, Patricia Arzuaga rallied the crowd gathered on Lawyers Mall, speaking in English and Spanish. "My father came from Jamaica," Brown said. "My parents found in this country a land of opportunity, founded on a good education." He said he and O'Malley (D) support a bill that would allow illegal immigrants to receive in-state tuition at community colleges and state universities. The crowd roared.

Arzuaga said her parents came to New York from Puerto Rico looking for a better life for their children. "All of you have history," she said. "It's also my history."

Before the rally, organizers fanned out to lawmakers' offices to push for passage of three bills. One would dramatically boost state funding for English as a second language classes to \$24 million from \$3.8 million. O'Malley has said he would sign the tuition bill, which requires students to have graduated from a Maryland high school. A similar measure passed the General Assembly four years ago, but Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. (R) vetoed it.

The most far-reaching measure would block the state from implementing a federal law passed after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks to tighten security requirements for driver's licenses. One controversial provision of the federal measure would require applicants to verify their immigration status.

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The driver's license plan, Real ID, is scheduled to take effect in 2008. Costs to states to comply are estimated at \$11 billion. "It's strictly an unfunded mandate," said Sen. Jennie M. Forehand (D-Montgomery), Senate sponsor of a **bill** to block the law, which could cost Maryland \$150 million. Opponents say the changes would also create big bureaucracies and long waits as driver's licenses are reissued.

General Assembly Republicans, however, have proposed legislation to speed up the law's implementation in Maryland.

"The legislation has already passed, and trying to kill it is not going work," said Del. Patrick L. McDonough (R-Baltimore County), who is sponsoring a **bill** to add a 5 percent surcharge to electronic bank transfers to Mexico from anyone in Maryland, whether a legal or illegal resident.

Organizers said a majority of the **immigrants** who **rallied** last night are in the country legally. But they said there are an estimated 250,000 undocumented workers in Maryland.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Newspaper

Subject: IMMIGRATION (90%); LEGISLATION (90%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (89%); GOVERNORS (89%); TUITION FEES (87%); US REPUBLICAN PARTY (78%); LOBBYING (78%); ILLEGAL **IMMIGRANTS** (78%); IMMIGRATION LAW (78%); US STATE GOVERNMENT (78%); US REAL ID ACT OF 2005 (78%); VETO (78%); SERVICE WORKERS (77%); POLITICAL PARTIES (75%); US PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES 2016 (73%); MUNICIPAL FINANCE (73%); MULTILINGUALISM (72%); WAGES & SALARIES (72%); FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION (72%); COMMUNITY COLLEGES (71%); ARTS & HUMANITIES EDUCATION (71%); CHILDREN (71%); STUDENTS & STUDENT LIFE (71%); HIGH SCHOOLS (71%); LANGUAGE ACQUISITION (67%); LANGUAGE & LANGUAGES (67%); DRIVERS LICENSES (64%); LICENSES & PERMITS (64%); SEPTEMBER 11 ATTACK (60%)

Industry: RESTAURANTS (72%); COMMUNITY COLLEGES (71%); HIGH SCHOOLS (71%); DRIVERS LICENSES (64%)

Person: ANTHONY G BROWN (79%); MARTIN O'MALLEY (78%)

Geographic: ANNAPOLIS, MD, USA (79%); MONTGOMERY, AL, USA (79%); MARYLAND, USA (96%); NEW YORK, USA (79%)

Load-Date: February 27, 2007