

## **Whitman Plans \$2 Million to Help Immigrants Become Citizens**

The New York Times

January 30, 1997, Thursday, Late Edition - Final

Copyright 1997 The New York Times Company

**Distribution:** Metropolitan Desk

**Section:** Section B; ; Section B; Page 4; Column 1; Metropolitan Desk ; Column 1;

**Length:** 644 words

**Byline:** By ABBY GOODNOUGH

By ABBY GOODNOUGH

**Dateline:** TRENTON, Jan. 29

### **Body**

---

New Jersey would spend \$2 million a year to help poor legal immigrants who are elderly or disabled become United States citizens under Gov. Christine Todd Whitman's new budget proposal, a move that might protect them from losing benefits under the new Federal welfare law.

The plan is the newest component of Governor Whitman's proposal to overhaul New Jersey's welfare system and bring the state into compliance with the Federal welfare law adopted last year. The Federal Government will no longer provide benefits for legal immigrants under its new law.

And many states, including New Jersey, are reluctant to pick up the cost of those benefits, which include food stamps and Supplemental Security Income.

A citizenship program would help New Jersey avoid that extra cost because once legal immigrants became citizens, they would be eligible for the Federal benefits.

"It's to the financial advantage of both the immigrants and the state to achieve naturalization," said William Waldman, the State Commissioner of Human Services, who said that most of the eligible immigrants live in Essex, Hudson and Passaic Counties. "So we're really mounting a campaign to help them out."

Although much of Governor Whitman's welfare plan mirrors the Federal legislation, New Jersey and many other states have softened the provisions concerning legal immigrants in their own proposals. Gov. George E. Pataki has said that New York will provide assistance through its home relief program to many people losing benefits. If the New Jersey legislation is adopted, the state will continue providing cash benefits to the 15,000 legal immigrants who already receive them in New Jersey and Medicaid benefits to 50,000.

Under the Federal law, most legal immigrants here and around the nation will no longer receive food stamps and Supplemental Security Income, a change that is supposed to save the Federal Government \$24 billion over seven years.

But the citizenship program announced today could help the state's most fragile legal immigrants become citizens quickly, state officials said, so they could start receiving the Federal benefits again. Roughly 22,000 legal immigrants in New Jersey receive food stamps from the Federal Government, state officials said.

## Whitman Plans \$2 Million to Help Immigrants Become Citizens

Under New Jersey's welfare proposal, legal immigrants who arrived here before last August, when the Federal welfare law was adopted, will still be eligible for cash benefits and Medicaid, all of which will be paid by the state. But those who arrived after the law was passed will not be eligible for these benefits, Mr. Waldman said.

Jack Tweedie, a welfare policy analyst for the National Conference of State Legislators in Denver, said New Jersey's stance on legal immigrants is not unique. Of 41 states that have submitted welfare plans to the United States Department of Health and Human Services, only four have not extended family assistance benefits to legal immigrants, Mr. Tweedie said. Those states -- Kentucky, Louisiana, Wyoming and Oklahoma -- all have tiny immigrant populations, he added.

The \$2 million for citizenship efforts would be distributed through the New Jersey Immigration Policy Network, a coalition of private charities that provide programs for immigrants, state officials said.

Any organization wanting to provide services through the plan would have to pay for half of the total cost, with state money covering the other half. The state would not pay more than \$325 for each immigrant participating.

The money would initially help more than 5,000 elderly or disabled immigrants pay for English, history and civics classes, which anyone applying for United States citizenship is required to take. It would also help pay for the legal services immigrants need to apply for citizenship, interpreters and transportation to citizenship classes and immigration offices.

## Classification

---

**Language:** ENGLISH

**Subject:** CITIZENSHIP (91%); IMMIGRATION (90%); PUBLIC HEALTH & WELFARE LAW (90%); WELFARE BENEFITS (90%); LEGISLATION (90%); IMMIGRATION LAW (90%); GOVERNORS (90%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (89%); INCOME ASSISTANCE (89%); US STATE GOVERNMENT (89%); MEDICAID (89%); FOOD STAMPS (89%); DISABILITY FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE (89%); GOVERNMENT BUDGETS (78%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (78%); NATURALIZATION (78%); PUBLIC POLICY (77%); HEALTH DEPARTMENTS (75%); SENIOR CITIZENS (73%)

**Industry:** MEDICAID (89%); GOVERNMENT BUDGETS (78%); BUDGETS (78%); HEALTH DEPARTMENTS (75%); BUDGET PLANNING & MANAGEMENT (72%); BUDGET PROPOSALS (72%)

**Geographic:** NEW JERSEY, USA (97%); KENTUCKY, USA (79%); UNITED STATES (92%)

**Load-Date:** January 30, 1997