DRAFT: PIF Sign On Letter for national, state and local organizations

Launched May 9, 2023

Dear Majority Leader Schumer and Minority Leader Jeffries,

The undersigned organizations are united in our commitment that every person and family has the resources and opportunities they need to thrive. Because when we all have what we need the country as a whole thrives. To that end, federal programs and policies must be equitable, accessible, and rooted in racial justice. Congress must eliminate eligibility restrictions and barriers to safety net access based on immigration status. As an important first step, we call on Congress to repeal the so-called “5-year bar” by quickly enacting the Lifting Immigrant Families Through Benefits Access Restoration (LIFT the BAR) Act and reject any efforts to impose new restrictions on immigrant access to benefits.

The lasting barriers imposed by the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) have harmed families since its enactment a quarter-century ago. By denying health care, food and nutrition services and other aid to people who would be eligible but for their immigration status, those barriers, including the so-called “five-year bar,” have made the social safety net inaccessible to millions resulting in harm not just to those immigrants, but also to their family members, including many citizens.

The LIFT the BAR Act restores access to public programs like Medicaid, CHIP, and SNAP, by removing the five-year bar and other barriers that deny critical care and aid to lawfully present immigrants who are currently excluded and their families. This includes people who have had “green cards” for less than 5 years, recipients of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Temporary Protected Status (TPS), and other noncitizens residing lawfully in the United States including crime victims, child maltreatment victims, and orphans who hold Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS).

The legislation ensures that lawfully present immigrants have access to services based on their income and resources. And it ensures that people across all states have similar access to the basic protections extended by federal safety net programs, while restoring flexibility for state and local governments to provide benefits to immigrants with their own funds.

Repealing these barriers is a racial justice priority. Nearly 1 in 10 Black people in America are immigrants, and immigrants account for 24% of Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, 33% of Latinos, and 66% of Asian Americans. Immigrants contribute greatly to our communities and economy, pay substantial taxes, and are parents to one-fourth of the children in this country. When it comes to eliminating racial disparities in health, hunger, and poverty, repealing the five-year bar is an important first step.

Some states have recognized that the 5-year bar is arbitrary and damaging and have eliminated the 5-year bar using state-only funding. Unfortunately, though, many states have not and some states impose even more punitive restrictions, resulting in inequities across states and unequal access across the country. Only Congress can equitably and evenly restore access to programs that ensure the basic foundation we all need to thrive and benefit from the opportunities this country has to offer.

We must work proactively towards addressing a long standing injustice, and ending the 5-year bar is an important part of this work. By doing so, Congress will be helping millions of lawfully present immigrants and their families access the quality healthcare, nutritious food, safe and stable housing, and economic security every family needs to thrive. Congress must pass the LIFT the BAR Act immediately. At the same time, Congress must ensure that no new restrictions to eligibility put barriers to services in place.

For more information, contact Adriana Cadena, Director, Protecting Immigrant Families (adriana@pifcoalition.org).

Sincerely,