



## BAY AREA IMMIGRANT RIGHTS COALITION

310 EIGHTH STREET, SUITE 303 • OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA 94607

PHONE: 510-839-7598 • FAX: 510-465-1885 • WWW.IMMIGRANTRIGHTS.ORG

Mr. Ben Rosenfield  
Mayor's Office Budget Director  
City Hall  
1 Carlton B Goodlett Place  
San Francisco, 94102

**VIA FAX:** 415.554.6158

April 6, 2005

Dear Mr. Rosenfield:

I am writing on behalf of the Bay Area Immigrant Rights Coalition (BAIRC) to urge Mayor Gavin Newsom to prioritize funding in San Francisco's budget for voter outreach by the Department of Elections (DOE). This funding is critical for the city to ensure that all voters, regardless of language capacity, have equal access to the electoral process. Specifically, we urge the Mayor to: 1) support the DOE's funding request for both bilingual outreach personnel and community-based organizational outreach grants, and 2) increase funding for *VIP fulfillment to naturalized citizens* from \$54,000 to \$75,000 to support the DOE's new strategy for ensuring that limited English proficient voters from Spanish and Chinese-speaking countries receive bilingual materials.

BAIRC is a broad-based coalition of more than 40 Bay Area-based immigrant serving organizations. Member organizations include direct service providers and grassroots organizing groups who work on a daily basis to ensure that immigrant communities have access to the services and education they need to lead fulfilling and productive lives. Language access is consistently identified as a key barrier that limits the ability of immigrant communities to contribute to the civic and political life of their new home. Without access to bilingual staff or materials, immigrant communities are left in the dark and blocked from participating.

This is perhaps most keenly felt at election time. Many immigrants may be able to exercise their vote for the first time in San Francisco. Yet, with a ballot longer than any other in the nation and the use of computerized and ranked choice voting, the voting process may prove too overwhelming and intimidating to new citizens. Bilingual outreach personnel, bilingual materials and the outreach work of community-based organizations can mean the difference between a new citizen exercising her right at the polls or opting not to participate.

Last year, BAIRC played a leading role in Mobilize the Immigrant Vote (MIV), a statewide campaign to support the full inclusion of immigrant communities in the political process. We provided training and multi-lingual voter education materials to 112 community-based organizations (CBOs) in San Francisco and throughout California. These groups collectively registered more than 20,000 new voters and educated more than 90,000 people.

We heard repeatedly from MIV participants that the campaign's success was based on two key things: 1) providing naturalized citizens with bilingual information; and 2) working through community-based organizations that are trusted sources of information for immigrant communities. Bilingual staff, community-based outreach grants, and increased funding for the VIP fulfillment to naturalized citizens are essential to ensure that all San Franciscans have access to the electoral process.

Thank you for your consideration. Feel free to contact me at (510) 839-7598 if you have any questions or would like any additional information.

Sincerely,

Margaret Zaknoen  
Advocacy Coordinator

CC: John Arntz, Director, Department of Elections