



# ★ WASHINGTON WATCH ★

An update on federal action from

## The Center for Public Policy Priorities

900 Lydia Street • Austin, Texas 78702 • 512-320-0222 voice • 512-320-

0227 fax

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### IMMIGRATION BILLS LIMIT ACCESS TO HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Both houses of Congress have now passed bills that would make major changes in access to public programs by both legal-status and undocumented aliens. Following these bills has been a challenge. The House and Senate each started out with a single bill dealing with both illegal and legal-status immigration. Then, provisions dealing with reducing numbers of legal immigrants were stripped out into separate bills. The bills that remain, HR 2202 and S 1664, still propose sweeping changes in public benefit eligibility for both undocumented **and** legal aliens. This analysis looks only at the impact on access to public benefits. The bills contain many other important provisions related to immigration.

The Congressional Budget Office has concluded that the bills violate the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act by creating costly new requirements for state and local governments. The National Conference of State Legislatures, National Association of Counties, and National League of Cities have opposed some provisions of these bills on those grounds. President Clinton has threatened to veto any bill that excludes undocumented children from public school, and has said the bills go "too far in denying legal immigrants access to vital safety-net programs." A conference committee will soon be charged with producing a compromise bill for final approval by both houses.

**If you wish to make your views on these issues known, now is the time to contact the Texas delegation and the President.**

### Section 1: Who Will Be Affected in Texas?

Significant numbers of legal immigrants in Texas use public benefits, and some could potentially be affected by these provisions. Apart from refugees, **legal** immigrants of working age use public benefits at about the same rate (5%) as working-age citizens. Participation by legal immigrants in Texas' programs as of August 1995 is shown at right. Most of the clients listed are **already** subject to counting of their sponsors' income, so few would be likely to lose benefits on those grounds (see Section 4). More clients could be vulnerable to loss of benefits if they fall into the new "ineligible alien" category under the Senate bill (Section 2), but data are not collected in a way that tells us how many. The greatest impact on program eligibility would likely be on **future immigrants**.

Program	Legal Alien Clients	Percent of All Clients
<b>Food Stamps</b>	186,572	9.1%
<b>AFDC</b>	22,418	3.6%
<b>Medicaid</b>		
<i>Families &amp; Children</i>	40,271	3%
<i>Long Term Care or Medicare Costs</i>	3,160	2.2%
<i>SSI: Aged or Disabled</i>	53,160	13.7%
<b>Total Medicaid</b>	96,591	5.1%
<b>SSI</b>	53,160	13.7%

Source: THHSC and TDHS, "Legal Aliens Receiving AFDC, Food Stamps, Medicaid and SSI in Texas, State Fiscal Year 1995. Materials produced at request of Texas Senate Finance Committee.

### Section 2: "Ineligible Aliens" Denied Public Benefits

Under current law, **illegal** aliens are already ineligible for all major federal programs **except** public health, emergency Medicaid, child nutrition,

child care, child protection, maternity care, and K-12 public education. The Senate bill would make many **legal** aliens **categorically ineligible** for

