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Summary of Governor's Proposed Budget for Immigrant Issues

Governor Evers has proposed a budget that removes barriers to driver licenses for undocumented immigrants, allows undocumented students to qualify for in-state tuition, provides additional resources for English language learner services in K-12 schools, and creates a Latinx outreach specialist at the Department of Agriculture Trade and Consumer Protection.

Driver Licenses for All

Governor Evers' budget would allow undocumented immigrants to obtain driver licenses. This provision will make Wisconsin highways safer, result in insurance savings for a broad pool of drivers, and help businesses connect with workers who have skill sets that match employer needs. Twelve states other than Wisconsin allow residents who are undocumented to obtain licenses. Prior to 2007, Wisconsin did not require that residents provide proof of citizenship or authorized presence when applying for a license.

Reducing barriers to driver licenses would improve the well-being of immigrants and their families. An estimated 32,000 undocumented residents would gain Wisconsin licenses if allowed. Of those residents, 14,000 live with children, and 12,000 of those residents live with at least one child who is a U.S. citizen.

Additional Resources for English Language Learners in K-12 Schools

Increased Funding for English Language Learners (ELL) – The budget proposal provides \$28 million more over two years for English language learners (formerly known as Bilingual-Bicultural Education aid) in public K-12 schools. This increase would substantially expand the number of school districts that receive aid to include many rural schools that are currently excluded. The amount of aid the state provides to support English language learners has been mostly flat for more than a decade, even as the cost of living and services has gone up.

Boosting aid for English language learner services would improve the academic environment for students of color. More than nine out of ten students who receive ELL education services speak either Spanish or Hmong as their first language.

Professional Development Funding for Bilingual Teachers – The proposed budget includes \$750,000 in the second year for grants that will support school districts' efforts to develop and train staff and teachers seeking bilingual English as a second language licensure.

Removing Barriers to Opportunity for Undocumented Youth

Currently, undocumented youth who grow up in Wisconsin and attend the University of Wisconsin or technical college must pay out-of-state tuition rates. The result is that undocumented Wisconsin youth are charged tuition rates that can be more than three times as high as Wisconsin students who are citizens, putting higher education out of reach for most.

The budget proposal allows undocumented students to pay in-state tuition rates if they graduate from a Wisconsin high school, live in the state for at least three years before that, and commit to filing an application for a permanent resident visa. Twenty other states have tuition equity policies that permit students who have attended and graduated from high schools in their state to pay in-state tuition, regardless of their immigration status. Wisconsin used to have such a policy, but it was repealed in 2011.

Undocumented students would remain ineligible for state or federal financial aid. The budget does not affect the length of time a student who is not undocumented must live in the state to get in-state tuition, which would remain at one year.

Latinx Outreach Specialist

The governor recommends creating a permanent Latinx Community Outreach Specialist position in the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection to expand outreach into Latinx communities.