

## 2023-25 State Budget: Immigration

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# Governor's Proposed Budget Provides Opportunity for Wisconsinites Who are Immigrants

**March 16, 2023**

Every Wisconsinite deserves to provide for their children and families, regardless of immigration status. Wisconsin is home to a diverse population of immigrants, contributing to our communities' economic and social fabric. Despite the immense asset this diverse population brings to communities across the state, they continue to face barriers from state and federal policies, limiting their ability to thrive. To strengthen Wisconsin communities and disrupt the arrest-to-deportation pipeline, policymakers must support legislation that acknowledges the contributions of our immigrants, including those that are undocumented, to promote prosperity for their families and the communities that welcome them.

The Governor's 2023 biennial budget proposal would lift up immigrants by expanding opportunities in education, career-building, and community participation, which would also strengthen Wisconsin's economic competitiveness. These proposals include:

### Driver's Licenses for All

The proposal would extend eligibility for immigrants who are undocumented to obtain driver's licenses. Currently, Wisconsin blocks these immigrants from obtaining driver licenses. This proposal would allow immigrant parents to provide more supportive homes for their children, and immigrant workers will be able to participate more fully in their communities. Driver's licenses for all will not only strengthen immigrant communities, but it will also improve Wisconsin's economy. Immigrant workers will be able to travel to work and have greater access to jobs without unnecessary and punitive harassment from law enforcement, which would interrupt the pipeline from the onset.

### Education & Training for Students

The proposal would allow students, regardless of immigration status, to pay in-state tuition rates if they live in the state for at least three years following the first day of attending a Wisconsin high school, graduate from a Wisconsin high school, and commit to filing an application for a permanent resident visa. Currently, students who are undocumented must pay out-of-state tuition rates – even if they have only ever attended school in Wisconsin. This

proposal will improve access to higher education for undocumented students who enroll into a University of Wisconsin System Institution or Wisconsin Technical College.

## Supporting English Learners in Schools

The proposal would also increase funding for English Learner students by more than \$74 million. Public schools will be able to support over 22,000 English learners who are currently not eligible for funding under the current bilingual program through a new Aid for English Language Acquisition program. By implementing this new program, Wisconsin's school districts, including rural districts, will have access to the resources they need to assist English learners in achieving success. Increasing bilingual services would improve the academic environment for students of color, many of whom speak Spanish or Hmong as their first language.

## Professional Licenses

The proposal would provide an opportunity for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients and undocumented immigrants to obtain professional licenses in Wisconsin, including commercial driver's licenses. This will increase workforce opportunities for immigrants in Wisconsin and contribute to our economy.

## Noncitizens in Law Enforcement

Finally, the proposal would permit county sheriffs and local police departments to hire noncitizens as law enforcement officers if the person has employment authorization from the US Department of Homeland Security. It is essential for police departments to envision a public safety model that is reflective of the communities they serve in order to build stronger relationships with immigrant communities.

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## About Kids Forward

Kids Forward inspires action and promotes access to opportunity for every kid, every family, and every community in Wisconsin, notably children and families of color and those furthest from opportunity. Using a research- and community-informed approach, we advocate for effective, long-lasting solutions that break down barriers to success for children and families. Visit [kidsforward.org](http://kidsforward.org).

An initiative of Kids Forward, the **Wisconsin Budget Project** is working to enact transformative change with the goal of constructing a new, more equitable economy. Visit [wisconsinbudgetproject.org](http://wisconsinbudgetproject.org).

