



Current federal legislation and its relevance to Hispanic/Latino families – health, wellbeing, education, and climate justice

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OVERVIEW

The American Families Plan and the bipartisan infrastructure deal are currently working their way through Congress. Both pieces of legislation contain provisions that would have distinctive impacts on Hispanic and Latino families.

AMERICAN FAMILIES PLAN

The American Families Plan was drafted by the White House with the intent of addressing the following issues: health care coverage, paid leave, taxes, and education. Key components of this plan include providing paid medical and family leave, the extension of health insurance tax credits, nutrition assistance, and funding for universal preschool and two years of community college.

PAID FAMILY/MEDICAL LEAVE

The benefits of providing employees with paid leave are well documented and include improved maternal health, improved economic security, boosted workforce participation, and improved employee retention and productivity. Despite these benefits, access to paid medical and family leave is not equal across all racial and ethnic backgrounds. Hispanics and Latinos have lower rates of access to paid leave when compared to non-Hispanic Whites. Although the 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act provides protected time off work, this leave is unpaid, making it unaffordable for many workers¹.

The COVID-19 pandemic has stressed the importance of paid medical leave and its role as public health infrastructure. Although legislation was passed to provide up to two weeks of paid sick leave for workers in isolation or quarantine, this provision did not apply to employees working for entities with fewer than 50 or more than 500 employees as well as other categories of workers deemed essential. This provision had a disproportionate impact on Hispanic and Latino workers, who were more likely to work in occupations deemed essential².

HEALTH INSURANCE TAX CREDITS

Hispanics and Latinos are the most likely racial/ethnic group to lack health insurance. In 2019, the Census Bureau reported that 50.1 percent of Hispanics had private insurance coverage, as compared to 74.7 percent for non-Hispanic whites³. Additional coverage losses occurred in 2020 due to the pandemic⁴. The American Families Plan extends the health insurance tax credits in the American Rescue Plan, however it is possible that disparities in insurance coverage are not entirely related to cost. Other factors possibly influencing health insurance decision include factors related to immigration such as the public charge policy. Under the public charge rule, visas or other forms of immigration status may be denied based on an individual's likelihood of needing to utilize safety net programs. It should be noted that as of 2019 this rule is no longer in effect, although it still may be playing a role in individual decision on whether to apply for health insurance coverage.

NUTRITION ASSISTANCE

According to the US Department of Agriculture, 16.8% of Hispanic households with children were food insecure, which is significantly higher when compared to non-Hispanic Whites at 10.4%⁵. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this disparity, with 47% of Latino households with children now reporting food insecurity⁶. The American Families Plan addresses nutrition disparities by expanding summer EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer) to all eligible children, expanding healthy school meals, and expanding SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) eligibility to formerly incarcerated persons.

SUBSIDIZED PRESCHOOL

The American Families Plan includes funding to provide for 2 years of pre-kindergarten and two years of community college. Both initiatives have that the potential to positively impact Hispanic and Latino families.

The beneficial effects of universal preschool have been well researched and include the following⁷:

- Child is less likely to repeat a grade
- Less likely to be identified as having special needs
- Greater academic preparation
- Increased likelihood of high school graduation
- Higher earnings in adulthood

Despite these noted advantages of early childhood education, Hispanic and Latino children are less likely to be enrolled in early childhood education programs when compared with their non-Hispanic White peers. Possible reasons for this disparity include lack of space and prohibitive costs⁸.

SUBSIDIZED COMMUNITY COLLEGE

In addition to providing funding for two years of preschool, the American Families Plan also subsidizes two years of community college. Note that greater percentages of Hispanics and Latinos are enrolled at community colleges when compared to other races/ethnicities. In the 2018 academic year, 55% of

Hispanic undergraduates were enrolled at community colleges, which is higher when compared to individuals of other racial and ethnic backgrounds⁹.

INVEST IN AMERICA ACT AND BIPARTISAN INFRASTRUCTURE FRAMEWORK

The Invest in America Act, introduced into the House as HR 3684 on June 9, 2021, is a bipartisan effort aimed at addressing the infrastructure needs of the United States. On the Senate side, there is currently no legislative text developed. However, President Biden has published a Bipartisan Infrastructure Framework and has been in negotiations with a bipartisan group of senators to generate a final agreement. Although the specifics of these pieces of legislation are not finalized, they generally address infrastructure related to transportation and climate justice issues. Certain parts of the legislation could have significant impacts for Hispanic and Latino families. It also covers the development of infrastructure that is more resilient to extreme weather, climate change, and cyber-attacks. Potential funding sources for this bill include reducing the IRS tax gap and utilization of unused unemployment funds. This bill also focuses on providing jobs to improve the quality of life for Hispanic and Latino families.

Although primarily addressing infrastructure, the Invest in America Act and the framework for the Senate legislation does contain provisions to address climate change, including:

- Investments to reduce greenhouse gases
- Provisions to for disaster mitigation and extreme weather events
- Investments in electric vehicle charging stations and the development of alternative fuel sources
- Investment in low and zero carbon railway technologies

The full list of climate-related aspects of the Invest in America Act can be found here:

<https://transportation.house.gov/news/press-releases/how-the-invest-in-america-act-tackles-climate-change-and-puts-the-us-on-a-path-toward-a-zero-emission-future>

President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Framework can be found here:

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/24/fact-sheet-president-biden-announces-support-for-the-bipartisan-infrastructure-framework/>

There are several aspects of climate change that make Hispanic and Latino families particularly vulnerable to its effects. They are more likely to live in areas more severely affected by climate change and more likely to work in industries that would be affected as well, such as crop and livestock production. As a result of working in these industries, they are more likely to be exposed to extreme heat attributable to climate change. They are also less likely to have health insurance and less likely to be eligible to disaster aid¹⁰.

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