



Case Study of WCC's History of Immigration Policy and Advocacy Efforts

BACKGROUND

The Women's City Club of New York (WCC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, multi-issue activist organization that is dedicated to improving the quality of life for all New Yorkers. WCC works to shape public policy to promote responsive government through education, issue analysis, advocacy and civic participation. Now in its second century of service, WCC has focused its efforts to empowering women to become more civically engaged.

WCC has historically supported policies and programs that welcomed immigrants, protected them, and facilitated their integration into American society. In 1915, WCC's founding year, members helped organize a rally in Union Square, demanding safe working conditions for women in garment factories, the vast majority of whom were immigrant women.

Recent events and actions reflect these positions in the present day. WCC informs its position based in part on information gained at public meetings and conferences and through Public Policy Committee discussions based on current news events.

ACTIONS

Conferences

On November 15, 2000, WCC organized a conference titled, "Immigrants in New York: Impact and Issues." Co-sponsored by the International Center for Migration and the Kaplan Center for New York City Affairs at the New School University, the half-day conference was keynoted by Margie McHugh, the then Executive Director of the New York Immigration Coalition. 314 individuals attended the conference.

On December 8, 2006, WCC organized a half-day conference titled, "New York City and its Immigrants: Their Contributions, Costs and Needs." The conference, attended by 110 individuals, was keynoted by Joseph Salvo, the then Director of the Population Division of the New York City Department of City Planning.

On March 27, 2008, WCC organized a conference titled, “Self Help Among Immigrant Women: A Women’s History Month Program.” The event, which took place at Marble Collegiate Church, was keynoted by then Commissioner of the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs, Guillermo Linares.

On November 10, 2011, WCC organized a panel discussion titled, “How New York Treats its Immigrants: Are We Better than Arizona?” The discussion, held at FPWA (formerly the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies) as attended by 69 individuals.

On November 6, 2014, WCC organized a panel discussion titled, “What Does the Future Hold for New York’s Immigrants?” Held at CUNY’s Guttman Community College, the panel was keynoted by Nisha Agarwal, then Commissioner of the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs.

Policy and Advocacy

WCC has a long history of engaging in policy and advocacy work to support and advance the needs of New York’s immigrant communities. Some of that work includes:

- In 2006, WCC advocated for increased health care access for all New Yorkers, including immigrant communities.
- In 2007, WCC advocated for a New York State policy that would allow immigrants access to drivers licenses without regard to the legality of their status in the United States.
- In 2008, the organized supported funding for city and state programs that would help integrate immigrants into American society, including English as a Second Language programs.
- In 2009, WCC supported passage of New York State’s DREAM Act through participation in the United We Dream Coalition.
- In 2011, WCC opposed the participation of municipal and state government agencies in federal immigration programs that require their employees, including police officers, to routinely ask individuals about their immigration status.
- From 2010, 2013, WCC member Carol Leimas represented the organization on then-Borough President Scott Stringer’s committee of organizations concerned with immigration issues.
- In 2012, WCC wrote to Governor Andrew Cuomo urging him to support the New York Dream Act.
- In 2015, WCC urged its members to obtain a New York City Municipal Identification (IDNYC) card and volunteer at IDNYC enrollment centers.

IMPACT

Immigration remains an issue at the forefront, particularly as President Trump sought to drastically limit the admission of new immigrants to the United States and deport those who are not documented. Immigration reform is stymied in Congress, but New Yorkers are fighting back, and WCC has historically been a part of that fight. WCC’s public meetings have shed light

on the issues and their solutions. WCC members have supported safe communities, sanctuary cities and DREAMers, and informed government policymakers of their support.