

AJC wins grant to seek relief for immigrants

Groups support bills to create new paths for U.S. citizenship



Shai Goldstein, executive director of the New Jersey Immigration Policy Network, places his hand on the shoulder of Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.), who has given moral support to NJIPN's efforts on behalf of immigration reform.

The American Jewish Committee has been given a \$500,000 grant by the [Ford Foundation](#) to help create new pathways to citizenship for immigrants.

Some \$50,000 of that grant is being earmarked for the AJC's Metro New Jersey chapter, funding a part-time employee to organize workshops and advocacy training with community groups around the state.

As a member of the New Jersey Immigration Policy Network, the AJC will join a multicultural coalition to step up a campaign for federal and state legislation that would increase citizenship opportunities for young people who become [college graduates](#) or serve in the military.

"I am excited. I have money and I'm able to do these programs and I'm hoping a lot of other groups are going to come aboard with us," said Allyson Gall, executive director of the AJC's Metro New Jersey Area.

On the national level, the reformers are hoping to enact the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act, commonly called the DREAM Act.

It would provide a path for some undocumented immigrants to become citizens if they complete college or perform military service.

In the state, a companion piece would allow undocumented young people to pay in-state tuition at New Jersey's public colleges.

"It will bring in more students and more money, which is exactly what the universities want right [now](#)," Gall said.

Leading the reform efforts will be Ron [Chen](#), the NJ public advocate, whose department will house an Office of Immigrant Affairs.



Allyson Gall, executive director of the American Jewish Committee's Metro New Jersey Area, and NJ public advocate Ron Chen at a recent meeting of the NJ Immigration Policy Network.

Photo courtesy American Jewish Committee

Chen, the son of Chinese immigrants, was associate dean for academic affairs at Rutgers University Law School and headed the governor's Blue Ribbon Advisory Panel on Immigrant Policy, which supported these reforms.

NJIPN executive director Shai Goldstein said the state and federal measures are "a demonstration that those of us promoting immigrant integration are promoting America at its best."

In a recent visit to legislators in Washington, Goldstein found members of New Jersey's congressional delegation in both parties "pretty open" about immigration reform.

While Republican support appears more problematic than that from Democrats, Goldstein said the GOP members his group spoke with “are waiting to see what the actual legislation looks like.”

Gall said she is optimistic about getting support from businesses, the health-care sector, hotel owners, and the state’s small farmers.

“They want the immigrant workers, and they say their businesses are going to do very badly if they lose these workers,” she said. “It is a combo of groups.”

Goldstein welcomed the AJC’s advocacy on the issue.

“A lot of organizations in the Jewish community have ways played a crucial role in promoting human rights, and this is another incident of that,” he said. “Being opposed to this is beyond my comprehension.”

Opponents of the DREAM Act include Americans for Legal Immigration Public Action Committee, which is targeting New Jersey as a battleground in the fight over the legislation.

“The DREAM Act would destroy this country,” William Gheen, president of LIPAC, told *NJ Jewish News* in a telephone interview from his headquarters in Raleigh, NC. “These illegal aliens will become voters and they will never vote for border security or immigration enforcement, leaving this nation defenseless against wave after wave of unending illegal and legal immigration.”

Immigration reform bills in both the state Senate and Assembly have been stalled for the past two sessions. A spokesperson for the Legislature said “it is unlikely” that the issue will be brought to a vote before the gubernatorial election in November.

“Americans want a path to citizenship, and a path is not a gift,” said Goldstein. “By definition, a path to citizenship is not amnesty. Amnesty means you don’t pay anything. You don’t suffer any penalties. Every path to citizenship that has been proposed has fines, penalties, and fees.”

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