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Panel OK on illegal arrivals' privileges

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Gov. Jon S. Corzine supports allowing illegal immigrants to pay in-state tuition to attend New Jersey's public colleges, but said extending state driving privileges to them is a matter for the federal government to decide.

The governor was responding to recommendations made Monday by his blue-ribbon panel charged with studying immigrant policies in New Jersey.

In addition to supporting in-state tuition and driving privileges for undocumented residents, the panel's report also addressed public safety, social service and labor issues affecting New Jersey immigrants.

Other recommendations in the report include:

Creating a state resource guide to define standards and resources for cultural and linguistic competency

Using "cultural brokers" to help immigrants navigate health care and other available social services

Opposing proposed state legislation that supports a federal program to check employee's social security numbers against a database

Enforcing labor standards and worker protection laws for immigrant workers

The panel also recommended the state create a government agency dedicated to immigrant affairs. Corzine said he liked that idea and would propose a commission in the public advocate's office.

Panel members acknowledged that some of their ideas wouldn't become reality immediately because of the current budget climate.

"We're realistic," said Charles "Shai" Goldstein, executive director of the New Jersey Immigration Policy Network. "But when the economy turns around . . . we will have a blueprint in place and that's good sound business thinking and government planning."

Elsa Candelario, executive director of the Hispanic Family Center of Southern New Jersey and the only Camden County representative on the panel, said she was anxious to see action on the recommendations.

"It's just much more healthy to move forward together and allow our immigrant population to come to self-sufficiency and realize the dreams that we all have," she said.

According to the report, an estimated 400,000 undocumented immigrants live in New Jersey.

climate. If approved, New Jersey would become one of the few states with a government entity dedicated to immigrant affairs.

The governor also is urging a reexamination of an immigration directive from the New Jersey's Attorney General ordering police to notify immigration authorities when they arrest someone suspected of being an illegal immigrant. He's also backing moratorium on federal immigration raids in the state, which he says often tear mixed-status families apart.

Some immigrant advocacy groups welcomed the panel's report as a good first step.

"It's not a one-shot deal, but provides a blueprint for the future," said Shai Goldstein, New Jersey Immigration Policy Network's executive director, who was a panel member. "This is not just for the state of New Jersey, this is a national model, because we've seen stops and starts when people just try to deal with immigration issue by issue."