

TO: Members, Senate Committee on Labor and Election Reform

**FROM: Kristin Settle, Working Families Project Coordinator
Institute for Wisconsin's Future**

DATE: February 8, 2006

RE: SB 567

SB 567, which would require documentation of citizenship before one can receive public assistance of any kind, is discriminatory and duplicative. It is insulting to both the immigrant community and native Wisconsinites who are trying to move toward lives of self-sufficiency.

Current law already requires verification of citizenship or satisfactory immigration status before one can receive public assistance. Obtaining documentation is difficult and cost-prohibitive in many cases. Requiring such documentation implies that one's word is not enough, and that is insulting to the thousands of Wisconsinites who turn to public aid in their darkest hours.

Documentation of citizenship is most often found in one of three forms – a passport, a birth certificate, or a social security card and photo ID. Each of these requires time and money to obtain, which are two things that low-wage workers seeking assistance are short in supply. A new passport from the federal government costs at minimum \$97, not including additional charges for the required photo. A birth certificate from Milwaukee County costs \$12. A Wisconsin ID card costs \$9, and can only be obtained with a passport or birth certificate, as well as proof of residency. A Wisconsin driver's license costs \$18, and also requires the above documentation. A Social Security card is free, but also requires the above documents and can take weeks to issue.

When a person must turn to the state for aid, time and money are short. Contrary to common belief, low-wage workers do not run to the state to cut corners. They come for aid as a last resort, often in desperation and in emergent situations. Requiring government documentation of citizenship will place an unnecessary burden onto these families.

One must also question the methodology behind this bill. The author may be intending to eliminate illegal immigrants from receiving state benefits; however, this bill would eliminate law-abiding citizens, including legal immigrants, seniors, and children, from receiving such care. It places families in harm's way and calls into question the very purpose of public assistance.

This bill discriminates against non-English speakers, African-Americans, and low-wage workers. It is an abomination that a person in desperate need of assistance must be made to jump through one more hoop to prove their worth. This bill is both demeaning and disrespectful.

Sufficient standards are already in place to ensure verification of citizenship. Requiring further documentation is insulting and will victimize Wisconsin residents trying to positively change their lives.