



POLICY & IMPACT BRIEF

The Landscape Shifting Beneath Us: Federal and State Policy Changes Impacting Immigrant Communities in Georgia

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Prepared by the Latino Community Fund Georgia (LCF Georgia)

Latinos contribute to Georgia's economy. The diverse communities of Georgia have more in common than not. At our core, Latinos lead with love and community. — LCF Georgia

Georgia's immigrant communities are navigating a rapidly shifting policy landscape. From federal budget legislation that strips health coverage and food assistance from lawfully present immigrants, to state-level enforcement mandates that turn local police into immigration agents, the combined weight of these changes threatens the stability of families, businesses, and entire neighborhoods. This brief summarizes the most significant federal and state policy changes across five areas: voting rights, health access, safety net programs, immigration enforcement, and education. For each area, we identify what has changed, who is affected, and what it means for the communities LCF Georgia serves.

1. VOTING RIGHTS

Naturalized citizens and limited-English-proficiency voters face growing barriers to exercising their constitutional right to vote, both in Georgia and at the federal level.

FEDERAL

- **SAVE Act (H.R. 1):** Passed the House in April 2025, this bill would require all voters to present documentary proof of citizenship (passport, birth certificate, or naturalization papers) when registering to vote. Studies show that up to 7% of U.S.-born citizens do not have readily available proof of citizenship, and the burden falls disproportionately on naturalized citizens, low-income voters, and communities of color.

STATE (GEORGIA)

- **DOJ withdrawal from SB 202 challenge:** In March 2025, the Department of Justice withdrew from its lawsuit challenging Georgia’s SB 202, removing a key federal check on the state’s restrictive voting law. This has direct Georgia impact, emboldening enforcement of provisions that disproportionately burden naturalized citizens and limited-English-proficiency voters in metro Atlanta’s diverse communities.
- **SB 202 (2021, ongoing effects):** Georgia’s omnibus voting law imposed new ID requirements that are especially burdensome for naturalized citizens, older voters, and those with limited English proficiency. The law’s stringent identification and verification requirements have pushed many first-time voters—particularly in Asian American and Latino communities—to the margins of the electorate.
- **Noncitizen voting ban push (HR 780):** A proposed constitutional amendment to explicitly ban noncitizen voting in Georgia elections stalled in 2025, falling short of the required two-thirds House majority. While noncitizen voting is already illegal in Georgia, the effort amplified anti-immigrant rhetoric and contributed to a climate of suspicion around immigrant voter participation.
- **Citizenship verification procedures:** Georgia verifies citizenship of registrants via Real ID and the federal SAVE database. Those who cannot immediately prove citizenship must resolve documentation issues before voting—a process that disproportionately burdens naturalized citizens.

IMPACT: These combined changes create a chilling effect on civic participation among naturalized citizens and immigrant communities, even among those with every right to vote. When the message from government is suspicion rather than welcome, democratic participation suffers.

2. HEALTH ACCESS & AFFORDABILITY

Health coverage for immigrant families is being stripped at the federal level while Georgia’s partial Medicaid expansion remains insufficient.

FEDERAL

- **One Big Beautiful Bill Act (H.R. 1, signed July 4, 2025):** This reconciliation law represents the largest rollback of federal health coverage in American history. It restricts Medicaid, CHIP, and ACA marketplace eligibility to only Lawful Permanent Residents, certain Cuban/Haitian immigrants, and COFA migrants—eliminating coverage for refugees, asylees, parolees, and other lawfully present immigrants.

- **LPR five-year bar expanded:** Green card holders are now barred from both Medicaid and ACA premium tax credits for their first five years of legal status—closing both pathways to affordable coverage simultaneously.

STATE (GEORGIA)

- **Premium tax credit expiration — Georgia impact:** Enhanced ACA subsidies are set to expire, with out-of-pocket premium costs projected to rise by an average of 114% for the 95% of Georgia marketplace enrollees receiving assistance. An estimated 694,000 subsidized Georgians—many of them in immigrant households—may leave the marketplace in 2026.
- **Pathways to Coverage (partial expansion):** Georgia has not implemented full ACA Medicaid expansion. Instead, the state’s Pathways to Coverage program—a partial expansion with work requirements—has enrolled only approximately 7,463 people as of May 2025, far below projections. CMS has acknowledged the program’s failure is due to lack of awareness, complex application processes, and limited qualifying activities. The program is extended through 2026.
- **National impact in context:** An estimated 1.4 million lawfully present immigrants will lose health coverage nationwide. The law cuts over \$1 trillion from health programs, with an estimated 10 million people losing insurance overall—Georgia families are disproportionately affected because the state never expanded full Medicaid.

IMPACT: Georgia’s immigrant families face a double bind: federal coverage is being stripped while the state refuses full Medicaid expansion. The result is a growing population of uninsured workers, parents, and children who contribute to Georgia’s economy but are denied the basic safety of affordable health care.

3. SAFETY NET ACCESS

Federal changes are simultaneously cutting direct benefits and weaponizing benefit use as a tool of immigration enforcement through the public charge system.

FEDERAL

- **SNAP eligibility slashed (One Big Beautiful Bill):** The law eliminates SNAP eligibility for refugees, asylees, parolees, and those with suspended deportation. Only U.S. citizens and Lawful Permanent Residents remain eligible. The bill cuts at least \$120 billion from SNAP nationwide.
- **Public charge rule expansion (proposed November 2025):** DHS proposed rescinding the 2022 Biden-era public charge rule and vastly expanding what benefits can count against immigrants applying for green cards or visa extensions. Under the proposal, immigration officers would have broad discretion to consider use of Medicaid, SNAP, WIC, and other programs as evidence that an applicant is a “public charge.” While not yet finalized, this proposal has already triggered fear.

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- **Chilling effect in Georgia is real and measurable:** Nationally, 20% of immigrant adults in households with a noncitizen have already stopped participating in food, health, or housing programs due to fear. An estimated 3.7 million members of immigrant households could lose Medicaid, CHIP, SNAP, SSI, or housing benefits, with potential economic ripple effects of \$27.4 billion in 2026. Between 500,000 and 2 million eligible children—including U.S. citizen children of immigrant parents in Georgia—may be disenrolled from Medicaid or CHIP.

IMPACT: The public charge threat is a tool of fear, not policy. Even families who are legally entitled to benefits are choosing hunger and illness over the perceived risk to their immigration status. U.S. citizen children are losing nutrition and health coverage because their parents are afraid.

4. IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT

Georgia has positioned itself as a national leader in state-level immigration enforcement cooperation, with consequences that extend into schools, workplaces, and daily life.

FEDERAL

- **Sensitive locations policy rescinded (January 2025):** The Trump administration rescinded the longstanding policy prohibiting ICE and CBP enforcement at sensitive locations, including schools, hospitals, and houses of worship.

STATE (GEORGIA)

- **287(g) program expansion:** Georgia now has 45 active 287(g) agreements with local law enforcement agencies, the most in the nation, with additional agreements pending. Governor Kemp has directed all 1,100 Georgia Department of Public Safety officers to receive ICE training under the program, effectively embedding immigration enforcement into routine policing across the state.
- **HB 1105 — Georgia Criminal Alien Track and Report Act (2024, now in effect):** This state law mandates local law enforcement cooperation with federal immigration authorities. Agencies must honor immigration detainers, report information on foreign-born inmates, transport individuals to immigration detention when possible, and verify immigration status for certain misdemeanor offenses. Local governments that adopt sanctuary policies face loss of state funding, and non-compliant officials can be charged with misdemeanors.

- **SB 21 — Sanctuary City Immunity Waiver (passed Senate 2025):** This bill would waive sovereign immunity for local governments that adopt sanctuary policies—policies that have been illegal in Georgia since 2009. The bill passed the Georgia Senate 33–18 in February 2025 and exposes local officials and employees to personal legal liability, further pressuring communities to cooperate with federal immigration enforcement.
- **SB 116 — DNA Collection from Detained Immigrants (2025–2026):** This bill would require DNA collection from any individual in a detention facility who has been charged—not convicted—with a misdemeanor or felony and is subject to an ICE immigration detainer. Current Georgia law limits DNA collection to those convicted of felonies. SB 116 dramatically expands the state’s DNA database, raising significant privacy and civil liberties concerns. If ICE does not pick up the individual within 48 hours, state law enforcement would take their DNA before release. The Senate Committee favorably reported the bill by substitute in February 2026.
- **Scale of enforcement:** Georgia ranks 4th nationally in ICE arrests, behind Texas, Florida, and California. Approximately one-third of Georgia arrests involve local law enforcement turning people over to ICE after they were already in custody for reasons unrelated to immigration. ICE has been observed waiting outside Georgia schools during drop-off and pick-up to arrest parents.
- **Protective legislation introduced:** Georgia Senate Democrats have introduced bills to regulate federal immigration enforcement, including SB 391 (Sen. Parkes), which would require a judicial warrant for immigration operations at schools, hospitals, houses of worship, and libraries, and SB 464 (Sen. Howard), which would prohibit use of biometric data such as facial recognition to verify immigration status. These protective measures face long odds in the current legislative environment.

IMPACT: When local police become immigration agents, community trust collapses. Immigrant families stop calling 911. Victims of domestic violence stay silent. Workers accept wage theft. The communities we serve become less safe—for everyone.

5. EDUCATION ACCESS

Immigrant students face barriers at every level of education, from elementary school enrollment fears to systematic exclusion from affordable higher education—and Georgia is actively adding new restrictions.

FEDERAL

- **K–12 enrollment declines nationwide:** Educators report enrollment declines for the 2025–26 school year, with 27% of large districts (10,000+ students) reporting drops compared to 9% of small districts. Families are pulling children out of school, terrified that a parent or child could be detained.
- **Mental health and learning impacts:** School staff report spikes in absenteeism, anxiety, distraction, and mental health crises tied directly to immigration enforcement. When a parent is arrested at school drop-off, the trauma radiates through entire classrooms.

STATE (GEORGIA)

K–12

- **Anti-enrollment legislation:** Georgia is among nine states that have proposed legislation to ban undocumented students or punish districts that enroll immigrant students with precarious legal statuses. While the constitutional right to K–12 education (*Plyler v. Doe*) still stands, the legislative climate sends a hostile message that drives families away from schools.

Higher Education

- **Dual Enrollment exclusion (GSFC, effective Summer 2026):** In February 2026, the Georgia Student Finance Commission revised Dual Enrollment regulations to require U.S. citizenship or eligible non-citizen status under Federal Title IV. This change excludes DACA recipients, TPS holders, asylum seekers, and undocumented students from the program—reversing H.B. 444 (2020), which had allowed all students to participate in dual enrollment regardless of immigration status. The new requirement takes effect in Summer 2026 (FY 2027), cutting off a critical pathway for high school students to earn free college credits.
- **In-state tuition ban (SB 492, 2008, ongoing):** Georgia bars undocumented residents and DACA recipients from in-state tuition and state financial aid at all public colleges and universities. Undocumented students pay nearly 3x the tuition of other students in the University System and 4x in technical colleges.
- **Enrollment ban at top institutions (Board of Regents Policy 4.1.6):** Undocumented students, including DACA recipients, are prohibited from enrolling at Georgia’s most competitive public universities—those that did not admit all qualified applicants in the prior two years.

Workforce & Economic Impact

- **SB 442 — CDL Revocation for Noncitizens (introduced February 2026):** This bill would automatically revoke commercial driver’s licenses for noncitizens upon visa expiration or after five years, whichever comes first, and require noncitizens to retake both knowledge and skills tests to renew. This threatens the livelihoods of immigrant truck drivers and the supply chains that depend on them, at a time when the industry already faces chronic driver shortages.
- **Economic cost of exclusion:** Georgia is home to 20,900 DACA recipients (8th highest nationally). Lawful immigrants in school or with high school diplomas contribute \$211 million in spending power and \$25 million in state and local taxes annually. An estimated 13,000 young adults could benefit from tuition equity.

IMPACT: Georgia is paying the economic price of its own exclusion. Every student denied affordable higher education—or cut off from dual enrollment—is a potential entrepreneur, nurse, teacher, or engineer lost to the state’s workforce. When we invest in all of Georgia’s young people, Georgia wins.

WHAT THIS MEANS — AND WHAT WE ASK

The policy changes documented in this brief are not isolated. They form an interconnected web that pushes immigrant families out of health care, out of nutrition programs, out of civic life, and into the shadows. The chilling effect is by design: even policies that have not yet been finalized are already changing behavior, as families withdraw from programs they are legally entitled to, stop sending children to school, and avoid any contact with government systems.

And yet: Georgia’s immigrant communities continue to build, to serve, to contribute. Over 124,000 immigrant-owned businesses operate in our state. Latino families are unifying Georgia through labor, through love, and through community.

We ask our partners—funders, policymakers, community organizations—to:

- **Invest in know-your-rights education** so families understand what benefits they can still safely access, their voting rights, and their children’s right to education.
- **Fund culturally embedded navigation services** that help families access health coverage, food assistance, and legal support through trusted community organizations, not bureaucratic systems built without them in mind.
- **Oppose the expansion of local immigration enforcement** that transforms routine traffic stops into deportation pipelines and destroys the community trust that keeps all Georgians safe.
- **Oppose DNA collection mandates and biometric surveillance** that target immigrants based on suspicion rather than conviction, expanding state databases at the expense of civil liberties and due process.
- **Champion tuition equity and restore dual enrollment access** so that Georgia stops losing economic potential by excluding tens of thousands of young people from affordable higher education and workforce pathways.
- **Protect the right to vote** by opposing citizenship documentation mandates that disenfranchise naturalized Americans and low-income voters.

About LCF Georgia

The Latino Community Fund Georgia (LCF Georgia) works with over 20 member organizations and over 40 partners annually to advance equity, economic inclusion, and civic participation for Georgia’s Latino and immigrant communities. Our team leads the advocacy and legislative workgroup at the Georgia Immigrant Rights Alliance (GIRA) and is present tracking, educating and advocating at the Georgia Capitol every day during the legislative session. Learn more at lcfgeorgia.org.

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