



All in for a Thriving Connecticut

Opportunities to Support Upward Mobility for the State's Immigrant Families

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Executive Summary

Immigrants and their children are a vital part of Connecticut's present and its future. The 549,000 immigrants living in Connecticut in 2019–23 made up 15 percent of the state population, and immigrants were responsible for all of the state's population and workforce growth over the last decade and a half. In addition, nearly half of Connecticut's immigrant residents had lived in the United States for more than 20 years, and 30 percent of the state's children were part of immigrant families, with the vast majority of these children U.S. citizens.

Most immigrants in Connecticut, as in the country overall, are successful and self-sufficient. In 2019–23, roughly two in five immigrants in the state had a bachelor's or higher degree, more than 60 percent reported speaking English very well or as their

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primary language, and immigrants were working at higher rates than U.S.-born residents. Immigrants across the country are estimated to contribute billions to state and local government budgets. However, many also face periodic economic challenges, and most immigrants can benefit from integration support in their first several years in the United States.

With an eye to the state's future vitality, this report focuses on key state policies and service systems that aim to support upward mobility for all Connecticut families, examining ways in which they meet needs of low-income immigrants and their children and how they might more effectively do so. It explores eight policy domains: adult education and workforce development, housing, issues affecting low-wage workers, health care and social assistance, small businesses, immigration legal services, K-12 education, and early childhood services. The study also considers opportunities to improve statewide coordination on immigrant integration and immigration policy issues. The analysis draws in part on interviews with dozens of experts, service providers, state employees, and other stakeholders who shared insights on how state agencies, community organizations, and others are working to meet the needs of immigrant families and where there are opportunities to improve policies, practices, and funding structures.

Some of the key findings and recommendations that emerged from this analysis include:

Adult Education and Workforce Development

Adult skills programs, delivered primarily via Connecticut's adult education and workforce development systems, provide services that can play an important role in supporting the linguistic, economic, and civic integration of the state's immigrants. Through adult education programs, which are delivered by local school districts, nonprofit organizations, and libraries, immigrants can access English acquisition, high school equivalency, and civics (or citizenship) courses. Such programming can support the success of the almost 40 percent of the state's immigrants who have limited proficiency in English, and the almost 20 percent of adult immigrants who have less than a high school diploma or equivalent.

Through the workforce development system, immigrants can access general workforce center services such as job search information. Those with work authorization may also be able to participate in workforce preparation programs, including apprenticeships (and pre-apprenticeships) and job training programs. These services can be particularly relevant to immigrants' economic integration, given that roughly half of the state's immigrant adults are employed in low-skilled jobs and many seek to earn higher wages and lift their career trajectories.

Despite the potential for these systems to support immigrants' integration and economic mobility, persistent challenges have kept Connecticut from realizing this promise. Compared to some other states, the adult education system receives significant state support, though these resources are still not sufficient to meet state residents' needs for services. Programs report significant capacity challenges, often lacking

Some local workforce boards' programs are responsive and accessible to immigrants, but the system overall lacks high-level efforts to leverage the potential of the state's immigrant workers to meet employer and industry needs.

teachers and other resources needed to meet demand for English and civics courses. And within the state workforce system, some local workforce boards' programs are responsive and accessible to immigrants, but the system overall lacks high-level efforts to leverage the potential of the state's immigrant workers to meet employer and industry needs. This system is also in flux, adjusting to contractions in services following the spend-down of federal COVID-19 recovery dollars. Finally,

insufficient coordination between the two systems, at both the state and local levels, has resulted in missed opportunities to tap into potential synergies between these systems.

Strategies that could unlock the potential of the state's adult education and workforce development programming to better support immigrants' integration and contributions to the state workforce include:

- ▶ **Increasing the capacity of adult education programs to provide English instruction and support integration of the state's immigrant population.** This should involve emphasizing approaches such as career-contextualized English instruction and digital skills programs, along with strategic investments by the state to ensure there are enough adult educators to meet demand for services.
- ▶ **Expanding initiatives and incentives for the public workforce system to serve individuals with English acquisition and training needs.** Most immigrants come to workforce programs already employed; what they mainly seek is contextualized English combined with training for additional in-demand skills, including those relevant to jobs with local employers. Workforce services providers would benefit from additional state guidance and resources for serving clients with both English acquisition and training needs.
- ▶ **Supporting local providers in navigating federal policy and funding changes, and charting a course to leverage system strengths.** Immigration-status-related restrictions as well as changes to the structure and amount of federal funding are likely to create new and serious challenges for Connecticut's adult skills programs, particularly its adult education providers. State officials should aid programs in navigating these challenges, and engage with system stakeholders to analyze

implications of the shifting policy and funding environment and to chart a course that most effectively leverages system strengths and assets to meet adult skill needs.

Housing

Finding safe, stable, and affordable housing is important for all Connecticut residents, but can pose particular challenges for immigrant families. Escalating rent prices, a significant shortage of affordable units, slow bureaucratic processes, and limited tenant protections leave numerous families cost-burdened and in a precarious situation. Immigrants disproportionately face these and other challenges as a result of language barriers and various forms of discrimination and exploitation.

The confluence of broad structural issues and barriers more specific to immigrant families is evident in reports of landlords imposing unfair rental terms, violating health and safety codes, and neglecting maintenance requests. Language barriers and limited systems knowledge can complicate exercising one's housing rights, finding replacement housing in a tight rental market, and navigating code enforcement processes, which can be time-consuming and result in penalties often too weak to motivate landlord compliance. Intimidation of renters either presumed or known to lack a legal immigration status, including threats to report them to immigration enforcement should they seek to exercise their rights, were also reported to be common.

With the state's interconnected housing affordability and availability crises and related topics regularly on the agenda of community and government leaders, the report notes several actions that could be particularly helpful in improving housing stability and protections for immigrant and low-income renters:

- ▶ **Scale up municipal housing code enforcement systems.** Many municipalities in Connecticut lack the capacities to adequately document and enforce municipal building codes and thereby ensure basic standards of habitability are met in rental units. Local governments should allocate resources sufficient to allow code enforcement bodies to conduct regular inspections, particularly in high-risk areas, and to promptly respond to tenant complaints regarding unsafe or subpar living conditions. Full implementation of the state's new law allowing municipalities to automatically place liens on properties for unpaid fines as well as raising fines for subpar conditions or code violations can further deter landlords from neglecting their responsibilities.
- ▶ **Expand tenant protections and provide robust support for legal advice and other initiatives helping tenants exercise their housing rights.** Maintaining and expanding efforts that help tenants understand and exercise their housing rights are essential, as is ensuring these supports reach and are accessible to immigrant communities. Key programs include those offering legal advice on tenant-landlord matters, direct representation in eviction proceedings under the state's Right to Counsel program, tenant organizing initiatives, and local government efforts such as municipal ombudsman offices. Adopting state measures such as expansion of just-cause eviction protections could also help protect more tenants from retaliatory evictions.
- ▶ **Bring affordability initiatives to scale, including by building the capacities of nonprofit organizations to take a leading role in developing affordable housing.** Near-term actions that

can help ameliorate impacts of the state's housing affordability crisis include expanded and effective use of fair rent commissions and continued expansions in funding for the state's Rental Assistance Program to better meet needs. Scaling housing creation over the longer term faces many challenges, particularly barriers posed by restrictive local zoning laws and the high costs of creating new homes. Yet the 2025 omnibus housing bill passed by the legislature advanced numerous consequential measures, providing hope that state initiatives of meaningful scale could be possible in the near future. Interviewees noted that significant scaling of affordable housing will require similar scaling of skilled and trusted partners to assist state efforts. Building on its prior initiatives, the state should create vehicles to leverage and scale the expertise of existing nonprofit partners while helping others build similar capacities. Scaling up partners that can assist in expanding alternative housing models (such as land trusts and renter-owned communities) should also be a goal of such capacity-building efforts.

Issues Affecting Low-Wage Workers

Immigrants are overrepresented in Connecticut's low-wage workforce, and they have driven all growth in this workforce since 2006–10. Low-wage immigrant workers are concentrated in service; production, transportation, and material moving; and natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations. The state has seen sizable wage growth among its lowest earners in recent years, likely driven by a 2019 state law mandating annual updates to the state minimum wage, tied to broader economic indicators. However, some low-wage workers in Connecticut—immigrant and U.S. born alike—face challenges to their ability to earn steady wages and enjoy the full protections of labor law.

Connecticut's ability to enforce labor laws has been strongly affected by disinvestment in the state Department of Labor. The department has seen its staffing levels fall, recovered less in owed wages for workers, and seen its backlog of cases awaiting investigation rise. This has created an environment that some observers argue invites employers to underpay or otherwise mistreat workers. Immigrant workers are often less aware than other workers of their rights under wage, hour, and workplace safety laws. And they may be more reluctant to assert their rights or report bad employers to state authorities, particularly if they have only temporary legal status in the United States, or no legal status at all.

Connecticut has invested in educating some immigrant-dense segments of its workforce, such as domestic workers, about their rights. But there is more the state could do to maintain strong labor law and wage standards for all residents. Recommendations include:

- ▶ Prioritize state funding to expand Department of Labor inspection efforts, focusing on investigations of larger employers in sectors where labor violation rates are known to be high.
- ▶ Increase efforts to educate immigrant workers about their rights in the workplace, what systems exist for them to seek recourse, and how noncitizens' immigration status does and does not affect their ability to access enforcement systems if they face abuses.
- ▶ Strengthen the labor division within the attorney general's office to focus on prosecuting civil violations of labor laws, as has been done in other states.

Health Care and Social Assistance

Low-income immigrant families' access to safety net programs such as food and cash assistance and public health insurance is strongly shaped by both federal and state laws. Rates of access to public health insurance, in turn, shape these families' ability to access needed preventative and specialized health care, with benefits that extend to broader community health and reduced uncompensated care costs.

Connecticut has taken a number of steps that have helped to expand low-income immigrant families' health-care access, but challenges remain. The state has taken up options to expand public health insurance, with federal funding, to children and pregnant women with lawful permanent resident status (also known as a green card) during their first five years in that status, and to fund prenatal care for pregnant women regardless of their immigration status. Connecticut has also dedicated state funds to providing public health insurance for children ages 15 and under regardless of immigration status. The state's federally qualified health centers and school-based health centers have created a network of basic health care for all state residents, including those who lack insurance. Yet changes may be ahead for certain noncitizens' access to such health centers, and more broadly, many immigrant families still face barriers to needed health care, including transportation barriers, limited access to medical specialists, language barriers and/or cultural misunderstandings between providers and patients, and difficulties navigating unfamiliar and confusing health systems.

Recommendations to improve immigrants' access to health care include:

- ▶ Increase the availability of in-person interpretation services for Spanish speakers and speakers of languages that have become more common in the state, such as Haitian Creole.
- ▶ Leverage strategic partnerships between health-care providers, community-based organizations, and other institutions trusted by immigrant communities to integrate broader social services with medical services.
- ▶ When funding is available, consider expanding HUSKY (Connecticut's Medicaid program) to a broader set of state residents, regardless of immigration status, or consider exploring options to expand access to private insurance through the state health care exchange to state residents currently excluded by their immigration status.

Small Business Development

As is the case across the country, immigrants in Connecticut are more likely than the native born to start and run small businesses, including restaurants and other food service establishments, construction companies, and landscaping and other home and property services. Businesses such as these provide important services to the state's residents and contribute immensely to the vitality of many of its cities and towns. However, Connecticut ranks low among U.S. states for ease of launching new businesses, and interviewed stakeholders described start-up funds and small business support programs as focused on potential high-value or "big fish" enterprises, and less so on the types of businesses the state's immigrants tend to start and operate. The "paper culture" of the United States—meaning its finance, banking, tax, zoning, health and

safety, and other regulations—can also be quite different from the business environment immigrants may be familiar with from their countries of origin.

Strategies for removing barriers and more fully tapping the entrepreneurial energies of the state’s current and future immigrant-led small businesses include:

- ▶ Strengthen partnerships among the state’s various business support programs and local entities to ensure services intended for local entrepreneurs are visible, accessible, and relevant to local immigrant-led businesses and potential start-ups.
- ▶ Make legal requirements and other technical information more accessible to speakers of languages other than English by translating key documents into top languages spoken by the state’s immigrants.
- ▶ Ensure that ethnic media outlets and business associations serving local immigrant communities are included when state and local government entities distribute procurement and other business partnership opportunities.
- ▶ To inform state and local economic development efforts, survey immigrant-led businesses and gather information on particular barriers they may face and services that would be helpful to their growth.

Immigration Legal Services

Noncitizens navigating the complexities of the U.S. immigration system often need help from legal service providers, whether to apply for more-durable forms of status (e.g., asylum, permanent residence, or citizenship), to sponsor family members’ immigration to the United States, or to explore possible options to stay in the United States after being placed into removal proceedings. Demand for immigration legal services in Connecticut has greatly increased as more newcomers with temporary statuses (such as humanitarian parole) have arrived in the state in recent years, and as the Trump administration has sought to end temporary protections and ramp up arrests and deportations of unauthorized immigrants. Legal service providers in Connecticut, like those across the country, are struggling to meet even a portion of this demand. At the same time, a large body of evidence shows that having representation greatly increases due process, boosting case efficiency and noncitizens’ ability to obtain protections for which they qualify.

Affordable legal services (whether pro bono or low bono) have traditionally been more available for immigrants seeking help with simpler application processes, which require less time and expertise than representation in immigration court. Assistance with asylum cases and defense against removal is harder to come by in Connecticut, and funding for such services has largely come from private sources. Only some legal service providers in the state are able to handle any removal defense cases, and of those, most are only able to accommodate a small number of cases at a time.

To ensure due process, policymakers and funders could consider several recommendations:

- ▶ Increase funding for immigration legal services, and ensure the funding is flexible enough for providers to use in ways that best increase their capacity. Some organizations need more lawyers, while others could use more interpreters, social workers, paralegals, or other support staff. Such

funding could be targeted to localities with fewer providers, or to boost representation rates among immigrant groups that do not speak Spanish and may be left out of mainstream systems.

- ▶ Incentivize creative approaches to meeting noncitizens' legal support needs despite funding shortfalls. Strategies to stretch available funding include adopting a workflow model that maximizes the contributions by non-lawyer staff; pro se (self-representation) clinics; and trainings and written materials that help noncitizens prepare themselves and their families for the risk of arrest, detention, or removal.
- ▶ Educate staff of state agencies that may play a role in immigrants' legal cases—including law enforcement and departments of motor vehicles—about how their agencies' work intersects with immigration law and policy. As part of this, efforts could be made to strengthen working relationships between these agencies and legal service providers.

K-12 Education

Access to free, public elementary and secondary education has powered the successful integration of children from immigrant and refugee families into the mainstream of U.S. civic and economic life for generations. Many immigrant-background children (those with at least one foreign-born parent) are classified as English Learners (ELs, also known as Multilingual Learners or MLs), meaning they are receiving English acquisition instruction at the same time as they are learning course content required for their grade level. EL enrollment in Connecticut K-12 schools increased by more than 17,000 students between school years 2016–17 and 2023–24, and their share of the student population grew from 6.8 percent to 10.5 percent. While ELs are enrolled in the vast majority of the state's school districts, they are concentrated in its larger towns and cities, particularly the Bridgeport, Danbury, Hartford, New Haven, and Waterbury school systems.

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The study's analysis of K-12 education supports for immigrant-background and EL children placed a heavy focus on instructional quality for ELs and their access to effective program designs, as well as system capacities for effective and meaningful communication with parents. Broadly speaking, the study found that while the state's policies signal that quality instructional programs should be used for ELs, its system design lacks structures and other capacities to support the creation and scaling of such programs. This is at the root of other key findings, including that appropriate instructional designs for ELs are not well supported or widely available, even when required; that general education teachers frequently lack preparation to work effectively with ELs; and that K-12 system leaders and teacher educators within higher education often do not have EL expertise. The lack of consistent implementation of effective program models can be seen through comparison to other states; for example, Oregon and Connecticut have comparable numbers of EL students, but while Oregon has 140 dual language programs, Connecticut has approximately 25.

Connecticut has a number of opportunities to ensure education leaders at the school, district, and state levels have the technical support and capacities to more fully realize the goals of existing state education policies and, in doing so, to support the success of EL and immigrant-background students. These include:

- ▶ Convene a state legislative task force to examine the existing educational programs and resources districts and schools are using to support EL and immigrant students' success, the obstacles they face in bringing quality designs to scale, and steps that should be taken to facilitate optimal scaling.
- ▶ Increase the number of expert staff within the Connecticut State Department of Education and regional educational service centers who are able to support schools and districts in implementing EL and bilingual program models that meet the expectations and requirements set forth in state policies.
- ▶ Increase the number of institutions of higher education with the capacity to prepare teachers of ELs, especially bilingual certified teachers, in order to help the state's K-12 schools provide effective instructional programming at the scale needed.
- ▶ Step up support for school and system efforts that meaningfully engage and partner with immigrant parents, including establishing EL/ML advisory councils, expanding two-generation programming focused on integration topics and challenges, and measures aimed at helping parents understand and navigate U.S. school processes.

Early Childhood System Services

Reams of research demonstrate the links between young children's early brain development and their future education and career success, making the quality and accessibility of early childhood services of vital importance to Connecticut's youngest residents. This includes several services for children ages 0–5, particularly child care, preschool, home visiting, and Birth to Three programs.

Children in immigrant families made up 29 percent of the state's young child population as of 2023. And in 2019–23, 37 percent of Connecticut children ages 0–5 were Dual Language Learners (DLLs), meaning they had at least one parent who speaks a language other than English at home. Given these significant numbers, state policymakers and service providers face important questions related to the extent to which early childhood services are available, affordable, and accessible to these children and their families. In addition, DLLs are disproportionately likely to come from low-income households and to have parents with low levels of formal education, characteristics that make them important targets for such services. The question is how to improve the capacities of early childhood services to address the particular cognitive, socioemotional, and language development needs of DLL and immigrant-background children via effective instructional designs—capacities that, to date, are uneven and underdeveloped.

Opportunities to build these capacities fall broadly into two categories: scaling up early childhood services to match the level of need for them, and ensuring services are prepared to support children of all backgrounds, including DLLs and those from immigrant families. Recommendations include:

- ▶ **Expand the state's bilingual instruction requirement to include 4-year-olds in preschool programs.** While such a requirement may initially be difficult to implement across all early education

programs, focusing its implementation on preschool programs run by public schools is feasible and would dovetail well with efforts to expand quality instructional designs for DLLs and ELs in the state's elementary schools.

- ▶ **Identify DLLs across all early childhood service settings, leveraging Early Start CT to develop and expand uniform practices.** There is a particularly urgent need to identify DLLs in early childhood education and care settings, as a means to both put critically important information into the hands of frontline staff and support system-level efforts to improve program services. The creation of Early Start CT provides an important opportunity to achieve these goals: it can serve as a cornerstone for a coordinated approach across state early childhood programs and generate standardized data the state can leverage to inform professional development offerings, staff recruitment and hiring, and broader system planning efforts.
- ▶ **Invest in educator and administrator skills.** While efforts have been made to share information about and encourage use of instructional designs that are effective for DLL children, Connecticut does not appear to have workable strategies for ensuring their implementation at a scale commensurate with local needs. A key element of such strategies would be investing in educator and administrator skills, including through relevant courses and degrees at the state's institutions of higher education and through in-service offerings. Developing these strategies in tandem with efforts to strengthen dual language programs in elementary schools could improve the continuity and effectiveness of service across early childhood and K-12 systems.
- ▶ **Create and sustain multilingual campaigns to strengthen parents' knowledge of early childhood development and teaching strategies.** With several of the state's early childhood programs manifestly unable to meet service demands, and nearly all programs short on workers with the skills to effectively engage with parents who have limited English proficiency, state and community actors should seek to arm immigrant parents with accessible resources to help them boost their children's early learning and healthy development. This could include utilizing emerging technologies to share multilingual information and resources as well as in-person learning opportunities.

Statewide Coordination

Immigration and immigrant integration are twin issues that intersect in complex ways with many other policy areas. Looking to the future, this underscores the importance of building the state's capacities to understand and address these dynamics in a more coordinated fashion. Many other states have taken steps to study issues affecting their immigrant families, coordinate efficient responses to particular needs, and/or create standing capacity within government to build expertise and lead responses as needed.

Actions such as these can serve as models for Connecticut, offering ways to equip its leaders with the knowledge and means to better respond to integration and immigration policy needs and opportunities:

- ▶ **Creation of a state Office of New Americans.** Such offices exist in more than 15 states, though their placement within state bureaucracies varies. Their roles typically include coordinating state agency responses to integration and immigration policy concerns and advising the governor and agency executives on immigrant community and state agency concerns. Maine is the most recent state to

create such an office, which it launched in early 2025 and situated within the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future. Its priorities include workforce pathways and entrepreneurship support for immigrants, improving coordination among organizations supporting immigrants, and expanding and strengthening English language acquisition opportunities.

- ▶ **Formulation of a New Americans Agenda.** The Massachusetts Office for Refugees and Immigrants, created in 1992, is one of the older state offices focused on newcomer concerns. A 2008 executive order by the state's governor redoubled the focus on addressing integration needs and created the Governor's Advisory Council for Refugees and Immigrants, directing it to work with the Office for Refugees and Immigrants and to oversee a unique statewide research and consultation process to identify ways to ensure full inclusion of immigrants and refugees in the state's economic and civic life. The resulting New Americans Agenda contains scores of recommendations that continue to shape state priorities and actions to this day in areas such as English language acquisition programs, entrepreneurship supports, and recognition of professional degrees and training obtained outside the United States.
- ▶ **Coordination of language access initiatives across state agencies.** Addressing language barriers in agencies' public-facing activities is both a practical matter, as states seek to protect public health and safety, as well as a requirement under federal civil rights law, which seeks to ensure that language barriers do not prevent individuals from accessing information or services to which they are entitled. Rather than have individual agencies or major programs develop individual translation and interpretation services policies and negotiate service provider contracts, some states and localities set an overarching policy and provide varying levels of coordination for these services. Policies in states such as New Jersey, New York, and Massachusetts typically set standards for such services, require development of language access plans by state agencies and their major programs, and create coordination and technical assistance resources to guide agency efforts. Additional important policy goals are achieving cost reductions and contracting efficiencies by aggregating demand.

Connecticut, like all states, is facing immense uncertainty about whether federal funding streams it has long relied upon will continue into the future, with potential implications for everything from the quality of its children's K-12 education to the vibrancy of its small business community. This comes as the state

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is adjusting to the end of pandemic-era federal funding infusions, and major funding cuts imposed by the Trump administration. Amid this uncertainty, and at a time of close federal attention to state policies toward immigrants, some of this study's recommendations may be actionable in the near term, while others may become actionable in years ahead, after the state has had time to adjust to new

realities. In the long term, finding ways to support the upward mobility of all Connecticut families, including immigrant families, will be critical to maintaining the vitality of the state's economic and civic life.

1 Introduction

Connecticut was home to 549,000 immigrants in 2019–23, comprising 15 percent of the state’s total population.¹ About half of immigrants in the state were naturalized U.S. citizens. And as of 2023, nearly 30 percent of all children in the state lived in immigrant families.² Immigrants have also driven all of Connecticut’s population and workforce growth since 2006–10.³ In short, the state’s future is closely tied to the success and integration of its immigrant residents.

Connecticut has made important investments in supporting the upward mobility of the state’s low-income residents, U.S. born and immigrant alike. For example, the state’s minimum wage is among the highest in the nation and is indexed to keep pace with inflation, and its Medicaid program provides coverage for many low-income working adults.

However, low-income immigrants—who make up one in five low-income residents in Connecticut⁴—often face unique barriers to their upward educational and economic mobility. Limited English proficiency can make it difficult for some immigrants to navigate schools, health-care systems, and other community institutions. Many immigrants also come from educational or professional backgrounds that do not easily translate into jobs that pay family-sustaining wages in the United States. Others may lack knowledge about their legal rights or about how to engage with their children’s schools, limiting their ability to advocate for themselves and their families.

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For those without durable legal status, these challenges are even more severe. Unauthorized immigrants and others lacking permanent residence in the United States often have limited access to economic assistance during times of hardship. They may also be unwilling—or unable—to report mistreatment by landlords or employers. And they face the constant threat of arrest and deportation.

Although Connecticut has taken important steps to address the needs of its immigrant communities, these efforts remain uneven. They vary by geography, immigrant group, and the degree to which they have become institutionalized in the state. By learning from promising practices in other states and from local-level innovations in Connecticut, the state has an opportunity to enshrine stronger supports for immigrant families within its broader efforts to support all low-income families.

While this report focuses specifically on low-income immigrants, given the distinct challenges they face, most immigrants in Connecticut and across the United States are successful, self-sufficient, and contribute to their state and local economies. For example, more than half of all immigrants in Connecticut in the

1 Migration Policy Institute (MPI) analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS), pooled for 2019–23.

2 MPI Data Hub, “[Children in Immigrant Families](#),” accessed May 23, 2025.

3 MPI analysis of pooled 2006–10 and 2019–23 ACS data.

4 MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data.

2019–23 period had been in the United States for at least 20 years, having built deep roots.⁵ Almost two in five had a bachelor's or higher degree, and more than half of immigrants who arrived in the past five years had this higher level of education. An even greater share—62 percent—reported speaking English very well or as their primary language. Immigrants also work at higher rates than U.S.-born residents of the state and have high rates of home ownership. In fiscal terms, their contributions are significant: one estimate finds that immigrants in Connecticut paid \$3.3 billion in state and local taxes.⁶

However, that success is not guaranteed. This report looks closely at eight policy domains in which the state could strengthen its support for immigrant families: adult education and workforce development, housing, issues affecting low-wage workers, health care and social assistance, small business development, immigration legal services, K-12 education, and early childhood system services. In each domain, the report gives an overview of current policy and practice, including promising initiatives to support immigrant families. This state of play is followed by recommended steps Connecticut policymakers, service providers, government officials, and funders could take to strengthen support for immigrant families' upward mobility.

To inform this study, Migration Policy Institute (MPI) researchers conducted 45 in-depth, qualitative interviews with service providers, nonprofit leaders, government agency officials, community leaders, advocates, and other experts across the state. The study was also enriched by insights shared by an advisory board comprised of community leaders, heads of immigrant-serving organizations, and representatives of advocacy groups (see Appendix B). MPI researchers also reviewed state laws, policies, and administrative data on state activities and trends, where available. Finally, the research team analyzed data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey to generate a profile of immigrant families in Connecticut, which can be found in Appendix A.

This report comes at a time of significant uncertainty surrounding federal policy, funding levels for basic services, and the broader economic outlook. States and service providers are grappling with deep cuts to federal funding streams they have long depended on, as well as shifting federal rules and requirements. Broader economic turbulence ahead could increase the number of Connecticut families in need of support, even as it reduces state tax revenues and constrains private and charitable resources. Some of the recommendations in this report can be implemented immediately; others may need to wait until a period of greater fiscal and policy stability. Where possible, the report prioritizes recommendations that do not rely on new state appropriations for their success.

In sum, Connecticut is well-positioned to lead in developing innovative supports for immigrant families. The state is building on a strong foundation of policies and social services that support immigrant families, and public support for immigrants is high.⁷ The recommendations that follow are designed to build on this foundation and help ensure that all Connecticut families—immigrant and U.S. born alike—can thrive.

⁵ MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data.

⁶ American Immigration Council, "[Map the Impact: Immigrants in Connecticut](#)," accessed May 23, 2025.

⁷ Lydia Saad, "[Surge in U.S. Concern about Immigration Has Abated](#)," Gallup, July 11, 2025.

2 Adult Education and Workforce Development

Adult skills programs in Connecticut play a critical role in promoting the integration and economic mobility of the state's immigrant population. As across the rest of the country, programs delivered via the state's adult education and workforce development systems aim to promote residents' career and educational success. Though linked with postsecondary institutions, adult skills programs primarily focus on adults (and in some cases, youth) who face serious barriers to their success such as lower levels of literacy or English proficiency, limited preparation for the workforce or marketable skills for high-wage jobs, and not possessing a high school diploma or equivalent. For immigrants and refugees, adult skills programs also deliver critical integration-related services such as English acquisition classes (also referred to as English for Speakers of Other Languages or ESOL), programs to help eligible individuals prepare for the naturalization process, courses on civics and integration, and workforce preparation or development activities specifically designed to speed the workforce integration of those born outside of the United States.

The Connecticut adult education system provides a range of services intended to promote the success of both immigrant and U.S.-born residents. Through this system, administered by the Connecticut State Department of Education, adult education providers deliver free literacy, numeracy, English acquisition, and civics/citizenship classes (among some other services) to adult learners.⁸ Instruction is also sometimes combined with workforce preparation activities intended to increase the career readiness or employability of participants. Programs are delivered primarily through school districts, though community-based organizations and libraries also serve as providers in parts of the state.⁹ Many local school districts also cooperate to develop regional adult education consortia that pool resources and serve broader swaths of the state.¹⁰

Between state and local sources, Connecticut reports a relatively large amount of funding in its adult education system compared to other states, valued at approximately \$40 million each program year between 2018 and 2022.¹¹ These resources are used for English instruction, citizenship courses, or courses to help participants earn a high school diploma or equivalent.¹² Federal adult education funding (provided under Title II of the *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act*, WIOA) is generally used by the state as a separate grant program to promote program enhancement activities and to deliver Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) programs, a combined English acquisition and workforce development program intended specifically for adult English Learners.¹³

8 Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), "[Adult Education Instructional Programs](#)," accessed May 22, 2025.

9 CSDE Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services, and Adult Education, "[Adult Education Program Directory 2024-2025](#)," accessed May 22, 2025.

10 Author interview with Connecticut adult education provider, July 29, 2024.

11 Migration Policy Institute (MPI) tabulation of 2018–22 data from National Reporting System for Adult Education, "[Table FFR 2: Federal Financial Report - Final](#)," accessed July 11, 2024. About half of this funding is provided directly by the state through a state adult education grant, while the other half is made up of local funding. For more details, see 2022 data from National Reporting System for Adult Education, "[Table FFR 4: Recipient Share Detail - Final](#)," accessed August 5, 2025.

12 Author interview with adult education advocate, August 5, 2024; CSDE, "[Adult Education Instructional Programs](#)."

13 Author interview with Connecticut adult education provider, July 29, 2024; CSDE, "[Program Enhancement Project \(PEP\) for Adult Education](#)" (Hartford: CSDE, 2023); CSDE, "[Program Enhancement Projects for Adult Education](#), RFP 817 - FY2024-2025" (presentation for Bidders' Conference, February 2024); Jacob Hofstetter and Alexis Cherewka, *The IELCE Program: Understanding Its Design and Challenges in Meeting Immigrant Learners' Needs* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2022).

In the program year spanning 2023–24, the Department of Education reported serving 18,766 students, of whom 12,310 (66 percent) participated in ESOL programs and 283 (2 percent) participated in citizenship programs.¹⁴ In the same program year, the state’s IELCE programs served 497 participants.¹⁵ These data points indicate that a majority of participants in the state’s adult education programs are immigrants seeking to advance their English proficiency and integration. While these investments by the state are notable, they meet only 7 percent of the need for adult English instruction among the 285,000 adults in the state who have limited English proficiency.¹⁶

While these investments by the state are notable, they meet only 7 percent of the need for adult English instruction among the 285,000 adults in the state who have limited English proficiency.

Connecticut’s public workforce development system is administered by the state’s Department of Labor.¹⁷ As mandated by federal law under Title I of WIOA, the state is divided into several local areas, each of which is governed by a local workforce development board that is responsible for overseeing the delivery of workforce development services and that is made up of key stakeholders such as employers and workforce training providers.¹⁸ As required by WIOA, each local area also includes at least one American Job Center, a centralized one-stop center where adults and youth can access or connect to a range of services for job seekers such as workforce preparation (career guidance and navigation, development of soft skills) and training for specific sectors or careers (including on-the-job training, apprenticeship programs, skills development programs). These services are delivered by a range of providers, including employers, technical schools, community colleges, American Job Centers themselves, community-based organizations, and other entities, with informational and job-search support comprising many of the services reported, and more intensive activities such as job training or apprenticeship programs generally serving fewer people due to their length, cost, and prerequisites. For example, in the program year spanning 2023–24, Connecticut served 2,634 adults through its WIOA Title I Adult program, which provides workforce preparation activities, skills training, and supportive services to eligible adults; 991 of these adults received training services.¹⁹ It is not possible to determine the immigrant share of those served via the state’s larger public workforce system or its adult program. While the state did report that 1,028 participants in its WIOA Adult program were in the broader category of “English Language Learners, Low Levels of Literacy, Cultural Barriers,”²⁰ English Learners can be native-born speakers of languages other than English (e.g., Spanish speakers from Puerto Rico) and “low levels of literacy” encompasses anyone served who lacked a high school diploma or equivalent, greatly reducing the figure’s value as a measure of nativity.

14 Connecticut State Department of Education, “[Statewide Profile Report for 2024](#)” (fact sheet, August 2024).

15 National Reporting System for Adult Education, “[Table 3: Participants by Program Type and Age](#),” accessed August 5, 2024.

16 MPI analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS), pooled for 2019–23.

17 Although connected, this system is separate from postsecondary institutions such as community colleges, four-year colleges, and universities.

18 Connecticut Department of Labor, “[Workforce Development Boards](#),” updated May 2, 2023.

19 U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, “[Performance Data](#),” accessed August 4, 2025.

20 U.S. Department of Labor, “[Statewide Performance Report—Connecticut](#)” (WIOA Title I Adult Performance Report, Program Year 2023–2024).

Among Connecticut’s immigrants, there is a significant need for the services delivered by these adult skills programs. Migration Policy Institute (MPI) analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey indicates that many immigrants in Connecticut have foundational skills needs that will likely continue to hinder their economic mobility and affect their integration trajectories. As of 2019–23, the highest level of formal education for 18 percent of immigrants age 25 or older in Connecticut was less than a high school diploma or equivalent, compared to 6 percent of U.S.-born residents.²¹ A small but notable slice of foreign-born residents of the state had particularly low levels of formal education: 6 percent had less than a 5th grade level of schooling and 11 percent had less than a 9th grade level.

These education shortfalls were even greater for some groups of immigrants. Among foreign-born Latinos in the state, 30 percent had less than a high school diploma or equivalent and 20 percent had less than a 9th grade level of formal education.²² Similarly, 31 percent of low-income immigrant adults had less than a high school diploma or equivalent. Among all immigrants (age 5 and older), 38 percent had limited proficiency in English, meaning they reported speaking English less than “very well” in the American Community Survey (either “well,” “not well,” or “not at all”).

These skills gaps likely shape the types of jobs immigrants in Connecticut hold, as is explored further in Section 4 and Appendix A of this report. About half (47 percent) of immigrants age 16 and older were employed in low-skilled jobs as of 2019–23, compared to slightly more than one-third of U.S.-born adults (36 percent).²³ Among Latino immigrants, 66 percent were employed in such positions.²⁴

A. *Key Challenges in the Connecticut Adult Skills System*

Although seemingly well-positioned to address skill and educational barriers faced by the state’s immigrant residents, several key challenges hamper the Connecticut adult skills system’s ability to fully and adequately address these needs:

- ▶ **Connecticut’s adult education system has limited capacity to meet the English acquisition, literacy, and workforce preparation needs of the state’s immigrant population.** Adult education providers interviewed for this project all reported long waitlists for English acquisition courses, and most programs relied primarily on part-time instructors. Other programs operating outside of the formal adult education system (i.e., not as part of the K-12 system) relied extensively on volunteers to provide services. These programs, often managed by libraries or community organizations, also appeared to be serving a greater share of immigrants facing severe foundational skill barriers such as very limited English proficiency or low levels of formal education, illustrating a critical gap between

21 MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data

22 MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data. Latinos of any race are included in this “Latino” category.

23 MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data. The MPI methodology for job skill classification draws on the U.S. Department of Labor’s online database of occupational profiles, O*NET, which classifies occupations by educational requirements, among other criteria, segmenting them into “job zones.” Based on this categorization, MPI assigns jobs to three skill levels: High-skilled jobs require at least a bachelor’s degree, such as medical doctors and scientists (job zones 4 and 5). Middle-skilled jobs require some postsecondary education or training (i.e., an associate degree or long-term on-the-job training or vocational training); these include registered nurses, electricians, and teacher assistants (job zone 3). Low-skilled jobs require a high school degree or less, and little to moderate on-the-job training, such as home health aides, construction laborers, and drivers (job zones 1 and 2).

24 MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data.

the state's adult skills programs and those most in need of services. In the formal system, adult education programs were also sometimes constrained by being administered through K-12 schools, whose primary focus was supporting the success of school-age children rather than adults.²⁵

- ▶ **The state's public workforce development and adult education systems face barriers to addressing skills issues affecting immigrant adults.** Despite having ample job openings and many immigrants interested in filling those positions, Connecticut's public workforce development system does not appear to be taking intentional or widespread steps to help immigrants address barriers to employment such as limited digital literacy or professional English skills. These challenges appear to be linked to barriers to serving those with limited levels of English proficiency in traditional workforce development programs, an issue that exists across the country.²⁶ Bridging such gaps could help immigrants fill critical workforce openings.
- ▶ **Connecticut has limited levels of integration between its adult education and public workforce development systems, limiting collaboration to address the economic success of immigrants in the state.** Adult education programs offer an entryway to immigrants seeking to build skills and increase their employability, while workforce development providers can offer connections to employers as well as opportunities for more formalized training for specific industries or positions. Yet interviews conducted for this project indicated that the potential synergy between these systems has not been fully realized across the state due to the limited capacity of the adult education system and the barriers workforce development providers face in serving immigrants.²⁷ A lack of state policymaker attention to the potential of these systems (and especially the adult education system) to accomplish these goals also appears to contribute to this challenge.
- ▶ **Policy and funding changes at the federal level threaten to disrupt which immigrants are eligible for adult skills programs and the reliability of federal support for existing programs.** In July 2025, the Trump administration released guidance extending across federal agencies, including the Departments of Labor and Education, laying out new immigration-status-related restrictions for accessing federal programs.²⁸ If fully implemented, these changes would restrict access to federally supported adult education programs to "qualified aliens" (as defined under federal law) and limit access to all WIOA Title I workforce programs solely to those with employment authorization (a requirement that has, for the most part, been in place for years).²⁹ These changes would particularly affect adult education programs, placing new restrictions on access to services such as English instruction, while also creating significant challenges for resource-constrained programs that will need to create systems to determine, verify, and report each students' immigration status. Beyond these restrictions, the Trump administration has proposed reducing the amount of federal funding for adult

²⁵ Author interview with Connecticut adult education advocate, August 5, 2024.

²⁶ Hofstetter and Cherewka, *The IELCE Program*.

²⁷ Author interview with local workforce development provider, July 12, 2024; author interview with Connecticut adult education advocate, August 5, 2024; author interview with local adult education provider, July 29, 2024.

²⁸ U.S. Department of Education, "Clarification of Federal Public Benefits under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act," *Federal Register* 90, no. 131 (2025): 30896; Memorandum from Lori Fraizer Bearden, Acting Assistant Secretary, Department of Labor, *Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 10-23*, July 10, 2025.

²⁹ U.S. Department of Education, "Clarification of Federal Public Benefits"; Michigan Office for New Americans, "How Do I Know If an Immigrant or Refugee Is Eligible for WIOA Title I Services?" (fact sheet, 2020).

education to zero in its budget proposal for fiscal year 2026.³⁰ Potential reductions in federal adult education funding for Connecticut would likely have the largest impact on the IELCE program, which provides workforce-focused integration support and is almost entirely supported by federal dollars.

Despite these new and existing challenges, Connecticut's adult skills programs, particularly adult education programs, have a strong record of serving immigrants, supporting both their integration and workforce mobility. Challenges in the system appear to be linked more to structural and capacity issues rather than the quality of services being delivered by local providers. The impact of federal policy and funding changes on the state's adult skills programs will depend on the manner in which many of these policies are implemented by the Trump administration as well as the level of support the state continues to provide to these systems.

B. Recommendations

These findings suggest that the state could leverage its adult education and workforce development systems to offer more effective support for integration and access to career pathways for immigrants in the following ways:

- ▶ **Expanding the capacity of adult education providers to address the unmet English learning needs of immigrant adults.** Despite English proficiency being a key driver of integration and economic mobility among immigrants, the adult education system in Connecticut clearly faces capacity constraints in serving adult English Learners. The state should seek to increase flexibility, technical assistance, and where possible, the resources provided to local service providers that are positioned to expand their capacity to offer English and digital literacy instruction to learners of all levels. Providing greater flexibility for programs to develop contextualized English and digital literacy programming as well as resources to hire more instructors would be particularly helpful in expanding program capacities to promote students' integration and career success.
- ▶ **Encouraging greater inclusion of immigrants in the public workforce development system.** The state should seek to promote greater access to federal- and state-funded workforce programs for eligible immigrant and refugee adults. Through technical assistance efforts, programmatic requirements, and initiatives, the state could foster more consistent cooperation between adult education and workforce development providers in addressing the career and educational needs of local immigrant communities. In particular, both the Governor's Workforce Council and the statewide Office of Workforce Strategy should consider how to build stronger alignment between the services adult skills programs offer, the characteristics of immigrant adults seeking employment, and the skills needs of employers seeking workers.
- ▶ **Linking K-12 system priorities with the unmet learning needs of parents.** Despite many adult education programs being delivered through school districts, there appear to be relatively few efforts to leverage adult learning programs to support the success of K-12 students. By developing parent-focused educational programs or seeking greater collaboration between adult education and K-12

30 John Fensterwald, Diana Lambert, Emma Gallegos, and Zaidee Stavely, "Trump's Budget Would Abolish Funding for English Learners, Adult Ed, Teacher Recruitment," EdSource, May 6, 2025.

programs in school districts, local stakeholders could improve services' ability to meet the learning and integration needs of parents while also supporting the success of their children in K-12 schools.

- **Supporting adult skills systems and local providers in navigating federal policy and funding changes.** State officials should work with system stakeholders to explore several looming challenges: implementation of immigration-status-related restrictions on program services, ways the state might ensure that compliance with federal requirements does not result in new operating costs for local programs, and should federal program funds be reduced, how the state might reduce its federal funds match and create a separate funding stream for adult education that does not carry immigration-status-related restrictions. In addition, given that Congress and the Trump administration may seek to combine WIOA funding streams into a block grant, policymakers should engage with local adult skills providers to strategize around how the state could navigate such a change and how potential new flexibility in federal funds could be leveraged to better support communities of learners across the state. On a broader level, state policymakers and leaders should seek to cultivate greater nimbleness in Connecticut's adult skills systems by analyzing how current funding streams and the administration of programs can be reshaped to better navigate the present moment and empower providers to meet community needs, including the integration needs of immigrants.

In closing, several areas merit further research, given the central role adult skills programs play in supporting the integration trajectories of immigrants and their families as well as the major policy and funding changes on the horizon. These areas include efforts to map and draw lessons from the nature and extent of service coordination between local adult education and workforce development providers in the state, and specific service designs used for adults with basic education and skill needs, including those who are immigrants and refugees. This information would be extremely useful, given expected shifts in federal funding for adult skills programming and the possibility that the state's workforce development strategies may be rethought after the 2026 gubernatorial election is decided. State officials, system stakeholders, and others may also wish to explore more fully the impacts of Connecticut's approach of delivering most of its adult education programming through school districts, particularly how this strategy affects programs' leeway and capacity to equitably serve key segments of the adult learner population, including working adults. This information would be particularly useful because although it is evident more capacity is needed to serve adult English Learners, there does not appear to be wide agreement among system stakeholders on what strategies would be most effective in addressing unmet demands. Finally, understanding the extent to which school districts leverage or wish to better leverage adult education programs to address the learning needs of parents with children in their K-12 schools, particularly elementary schools, would be useful should the state find itself with more leeway to conduct programs that do not need to meet federal employment-focused performance indicators.

Several areas merit further research, given the central role adult skills programs play in supporting the integration trajectories of immigrants and their families as well as the major policy and funding changes on the horizon.

3 Housing

Safe, affordable housing is an essential pillar supporting the quality of life and economic stability of individuals and families. While challenges in obtaining safe and affordable housing affect a significant share of all Connecticut residents, immigrants often face additional obstacles due to language barriers, housing discrimination, large household sizes, and documentation requirements (such as for a formal credit history or a social security number).³¹

These obstacles are exacerbated when housing costs are exceptionally high, as they are in Connecticut. In fact, Connecticut was ranked the worst state in the nation for renters in 2024 due to its high costs and low availability of rental units.³² One analysis found that 34 percent of its households were renters (480,258);³³ of these renters, 28 percent were extremely low income, and 73 percent of low-income renter households were living with a severe cost burden to pay rent (i.e., they must sacrifice other survival necessities to afford housing).³⁴

While challenges in obtaining safe and affordable housing affect a significant share of all Connecticut residents, immigrants often face additional obstacles.

Severe cost burdens contribute significantly to housing instability among low-income households, which has cascading negative effects on household members' educational attainment, health, and other important indicators of well-being. Though the state manages several programs that aim to address a range of housing issues, these mostly lack the capacities to address needs at scale. This is particularly evident with regard to affordable housing units; only 1,335 such units were reported to have been added in 2024,³⁵ while the state is estimated as needing more than 95,000 additional units.³⁶

A. Critical Housing Challenges

Analysis of state and local laws and policies, public reports, emergent legislation, and insights shared in interviews with experts both outside and inside government points to the following issues as critically important for understanding the scope of the housing crisis in Connecticut and the ways in which this crisis sometimes differently, and often disproportionately, affects immigrant families.

31 Jaime Ballard, Malina Her, and True J. Thao, *A Place to Call Home: Housing Challenges among Immigrant Families* (St. Paul: National Council on Family Relations, 2020); Sharon Cornelissen and Livesay Pack, *Immigrants' Access to Homeownership in the United States: A Review of Barriers, Discrimination, and Opportunities* (Cambridge, MA: Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, 2023).

32 Jamil Ragland, "New Reports Show Connecticut's Housing Crisis Continues to Worsen," Partnership for Strong Communities, June 4, 2024.

33 National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC), "Out of Reach—Connecticut," accessed June 6, 2025.

34 NLIHC, "Housing Needs by State—Connecticut," accessed June 6, 2025.

35 Jacqueline Rabe Thomas and Alex Putterman, "Gov. Lamont Says CT Is Building Lots of Housing. The Data Says Otherwise," CT Insider, April 15, 2025.

36 NLIHC, "Housing Needs by State—Connecticut."

Lack of affordability pushes stable housing further and further out of reach.

Lack of affordability is widely identified as the top housing concern negatively affecting state residents and worsening interrelated issues such as homelessness and housing discrimination. The issue of affordability is multipronged, rooted in the consolidation of real estate ownership, the decline of public housing, restrictive zoning measures, and wages failing to keep up with inflation. The current minimum wage in Connecticut (\$16.35/hour) is not enough to meet the rising cost of housing within the state: fair-market rent for a two-bedroom unit is \$1,796 per month, meaning that to afford such a unit, a household would need to earn more than \$35/hour in a full-time, year-round job or work about 84 hours per week at the minimum wage.³⁷ This does not account for immigrant-dense urban areas, such as New Haven or Bridgeport, where demand for rental housing far outstrips supply and drives prices higher than neighboring towns and counties.

Connecticut also lags states in the northeast and nationally in new housing production, with decades of underproduction helping to fuel the state's rising housing and living costs,³⁸ which push more and more households into increasingly competitive home-buying and rental markets that cannot meet demand. Furthermore, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, investors were responsible for a record 26 percent of low-priced home purchases nationwide in the first quarter of 2024.³⁹ While many investors flip newly acquired properties for profit or put them on the rental market, the trend of increasing privatized housing cannot meet the rental unit shortfall, particularly when new units are largely not affordable.

Immigrant renters face housing discrimination and subpar living conditions, with limited opportunities for recourse.

Immigrants in Connecticut were widely reported by housing organizations and community leaders to face heightened risks of housing discrimination and exploitation. While interviewees noted that financial instability heightens the risk of tenant abuse for all low-income families, language barriers, immigration status insecurity, and a lack of familiarity with local housing laws were repeatedly described as making immigrants uniquely vulnerable to exploitative landlords.⁴⁰ Such exploitation includes landlords imposing unfair rental terms and neglecting necessary maintenance, which can lead to substandard, overcrowded, and overpriced living conditions.

Paths for tenant redress were reported to be weak, particularly for those seeking remedies to subpar housing conditions (such as mold or pest infestations); these are in turn related to weaknesses in formal complaint and housing code enforcement processes as well as limited availability of low-cost legal support and representation.⁴¹ With regard to legal support and representation, in recent years the state has made significant progress in increasing legal counsel for low-income individuals facing eviction, owing to the Right to Counsel legislation it adopted in 2021.⁴²

³⁷ NLIHC, "Out of Reach—Connecticut."

³⁸ Dustin Nord, *The Economic Impact of Connecticut's Housing Shortage* (Hartford: Connecticut Business and Industry Association, 2025).

³⁹ Lily Katz, "Investor Home Purchases Rise for the First Time in Nearly Two Years," Redfin News, May 15, 2024.

⁴⁰ Author interview with Connecticut refugee resettlement program managers, June 25, 2024; author interview with housing legal support organization staff, August 21, 2024; author interview with community organizing group, November 6, 2024.

⁴¹ Author interview with housing legal support organization staff, August 21, 2024.

⁴² The state's Right to Counsel law was enacted in May 2021 and launched in January 2022. See Connecticut Bar Foundation, "Right to Counsel," accessed July 11, 2025.

Other high-profile efforts to strengthen eviction protections have included attempts to expand the state's just-cause protections for renters in buildings with more than five units beyond those already covered (people who are over 62 years old or who have a disability) to include all renters in buildings and complexes of that size.⁴³ These protections prevent eviction of a tenant simply because their lease is expiring; instead, there must be other legal grounds for eviction, such as non-payment of rent or failure to comply with the rental agreement. Tenant advocates argue that current limitations in coverage leave large swaths of tenants vulnerable to landlords' retaliatory use of "lapse-of-time" or "no-fault" evictions against those who seek repairs or join a tenant union; landlords, in turn, argue that nonrenewal at the end of a lease term is a right clearly reserved to them, and a means to maintain the quality and viability of their properties.⁴⁴ Legislation seeking to expand just-cause protections has been hotly contested over the past several years in the state legislature, failing in 2025 to gain passage for the third time.⁴⁵

Reporting across the state suggests there is a critical gap in code enforcement.

The state's notable advances in legal support for those facing eviction notwithstanding, access to low-cost legal advice or representation is far more limited for those seeking repairs or other actions from landlords to address health or safety concerns.

While the state sets housing code regulations, each municipality is responsible for the code's enforcement,⁴⁶ and enforcement processes for such complaints are handled by local governments. Reporting across the state suggests there is a critical gap in code enforcement.⁴⁷ Inspections are reported to often find numerous code compliance issues including pests, harmful mold, leaks, and more, while landlords' follow-through with repairs can be slow or ad hoc (e.g., painting over mold rather than mitigating it). Though code compliance officers issue a "repair by" date, there is often little to no follow through to determine if problems have been addressed, and tenants often lack a means of redress or fear eviction if they submit a complaint.⁴⁸ Code compliance officers are also reported to face insufficient staffing and a growing backlog of complaints.⁴⁹

Recent attempts to close gaps in enforcement include New Haven's Living City Initiative, which rolled out measures in 2024 that include the use of certified mail to send orders to landlords, cutting down the time landlords have to make repairs, and automatically scheduling a reinspection date.⁵⁰ And in May 2025, the state legislature passed a bill (SB 1317) allowing for unpaid penalties on housing code violations to become liens on properties; the governor signed this additional enforcement tool into law in June.⁵¹

43 State of Connecticut, *An Act Concerning Evictions for Cause*, SB143 (2024).

44 A no-fault eviction is a legal process that allows a landlord to evict a tenant without providing a reason. See Yash Roy, "What Are No-Fault Evictions and Why Is CT Considering Eliminating Them?," CT Insider, March 11, 2024.

45 Ginny Monk, "Just Cause' Eviction Reform Dies in CT Legislature—Again," Connecticut Public Radio, May 20, 2025.

46 State of Connecticut Administrative Services, "About the Connecticut State Building Code," accessed June 6, 2025.

47 See, for example, Jared Weber, "No Heat or Hot Water: Stamford Housing Code Violations Leave Renters Asking Why City Can't Do More," The Stamford Advocate, February 3, 2024; Thomas Birmingham, "As Corporate Landlords Spread, a Mold Epidemic Takes Root," In These Times, October 23, 2024.

48 Camila Vallejo, "I Regret It': How Asking for Healthy Housing Ended in an Eviction Record for One New Haven Family," Connecticut Public Radio, June 23, 2023.

49 Weber, "No Heat or Hot Water."

50 Lily Belle Poling, "Under New Leadership, LCI Is Ramping up Housing Code Enforcement," Yale News, September 13, 2024.

51 State of Connecticut, *An Act Concerning Liens for Violations of the Housing Code*, State of Connecticut Public Act No. 25–33 (2025).

Multiple factors intersect and undercut efforts to increase the supply of affordable housing units.

Efforts to make significant progress toward meeting the state's needs for affordable apartments and starter homes face many challenges, particularly restrictive zoning laws in many towns and cities and the high costs involved in creating new housing. Approaches for addressing these and related issues are regularly debated among state and local policymakers, housing activists, developers, conservation advocates, and other business and civic leaders.

With a strong tradition of local control and the state comprised of 169 independently managed municipalities, for many years state leaders have typically had little success in advancing policies that could make a significant dent in housing development needs. Yet the 2025 legislative session saw the incorporation of several consequential measures into an omnibus housing bill (H.B. 5002) that was approved by both houses.⁵² The measures included incentives for localities that adopt zoning measures expanding multifamily units and set-asides for low-income tenants; easing rules for the conversion of commercial properties to residential use; and prioritization of certain supports for “work, live, ride” mixed-use neighborhoods near transit hubs.

After several weeks of deliberation, Governor Ned Lamont vetoed the legislation in late June; however it is possible a special legislative session will be convened before the end of the year to reconsider the bill's viability. Whether any of the much-debated changes ultimately become law and the extent to which they are either welcomed or resisted remain to be seen; however, success in addressing affordable housing needs also depends on the extent to which new housing is built at costs and profit margins that encourage and/or make it financially feasible for new homes to be made available below market rates. To help encourage this, the state has a variety of tools at its disposal to reduce project financing costs,⁵³ and some analysts also point to steps the state can take to reduce building costs.⁵⁴ In the face of extremely powerful market forces and the profit motives driving most investments in housing development, some interviewees also pointed to the need for expanded state efforts to support the growth of nonprofit organizations that can serve as skilled and reliable partners in helping the state and local governments reach their affordable housing goals.⁵⁵

B. Recommendations

1. Address housing affordability in the near and longer term

While expanding the supply of affordable homes is at the heart of solutions to the state's affordability crisis, even with the most effectively designed policies it will take many years to meaningfully affect market dynamics and housing prices. In the meantime, taking multiple steps to address affordability is essential to

⁵² Ginny Monk, “What to Know about H.B. 5002, the Omnibus Housing Bill,” CT Mirror, June 3, 2025.

⁵³ Connecticut Housing Finance Authority, “Development of Multifamily Affordable Rental Housing,” accessed June 11, 2025.

⁵⁴ David Flemming and Francis Pickering, *Getting a Handle on Affordable Housing: A More Honest Way to Evaluate Connecticut's Housing Needs* (Wethersfield, CT: Yankee Institute, 2024).

⁵⁵ Author interview with state housing administrators, July 2, 2024; author interview with community organizing group, November 6, 2024.

the security and well-being of the state’s residents—immigrant and U.S. born alike—and to its economy and workforce. These include:

- ▶ **Expand requirements for establishment of fair rent commissions to a larger share of the state’s municipalities.** Such a step could act as a brake on escalating rental costs and help protect tenants from unreasonable rate increases and further dislocation. The state’s existing requirement for establishment of such commissions in municipalities with more than 25,000 residents helps ensure there is a public venue and redress process for tenants faced with unconscionable rent increases and those seeking rent limits in cases of health or safety violations. Expansions can be realized as anticipated under H.B. 5002 or by direct actions on the part of municipalities that do not have such commissions. To ensure immigrant communities are aware of and prepared to leverage commission processes, tenant advocacy and housing legal services organizations should be supported to engage and connect immigrant constituencies to them.
- ▶ **Scale state funding for rental assistance and homebuying initiatives to better meet needs.** This includes funding the state’s Rental Assistance Program at levels that allow it to keep pace with inflation and continue to add additional capacity for high-need individuals and families. State officials should also consider expanding bond authorizations for state affordability initiatives, such as Time to Own forgivable loans for downpayments of first-time homebuyers, to ensure these important supports can continue to ease housing cost burdens for many state residents.

2. Scale up municipal housing code enforcement systems and other tenant protections

Many municipalities in the state lack the capacities required to adequately enforce housing codes and ensure basic standards of habitability are met in rental units. This is due to a range of factors, including having too few code compliance staff, violation penalties too weak to motivate landlord compliance, and difficulties the municipality may face in securing alternative housing should it be faced with a need to remove tenants from a unit deemed uninhabitable.⁵⁶ Given the potentially lifelong negative consequences tenants may suffer as a result of unsafe or unhealthy housing conditions, actions the state, its municipalities, and system stakeholders can take to improve this critical government function and other tenant protections include:

- ▶ **Support full implementation of SB 1317,** which provides authority for municipalities to automatically place liens on properties for unpaid housing code enforcement fines. Fully leveraging the powers granted under this law will provide a needed incentive for landlords to meet maintenance needs and address unsafe and unsanitary conditions at their properties.
- ▶ **Study approaches other states/localities are using to ensure their code enforcement systems are able to effectively and equitably serve residents.** This review could include topics such as sufficiently funding key process functions, promoting cross-agency cooperation, and engaging

⁵⁶ Author interview with housing legal support organization staff, August 21, 2024.

community organizations to educate residents and property owners.⁵⁷ Following this review, state leaders could engage system stakeholders to consider findings and identify strategies to address weaknesses in the state's system.

- ▶ **Provide assistance (e.g., financial, technical) to municipalities to seed improvements in key system functions and to track and disseminate results.** With immigrant communities comprising a significant share of renters and facing additional, specific barriers in seeking redress for subpar housing conditions, supporting improvements in a municipality's operations can have an outsized impact in overcoming barriers they face. Innovations that could be seeded include proactive rental inspections, use of which avoids the potential for tenant retaliation inherent in complaint-based inspection processes.⁵⁸
- ▶ **Continue to expand tenant supports including via Right to Counsel program funding and just-cause eviction protections.** The state's program providing counsel to thousands of tenants in eviction proceedings has had significant success in recent years;⁵⁹ ensuring continued funding for its efforts can ensure tenants have a fair chance to present their case in court and prevent unnecessary and/or unfair displacement of potentially thousands of families in years to come. While legislation to expand just-cause eviction protections was not adopted in the recent legislative session, their expansion could prove extremely important with major changes on the horizon that appear likely to increase household vulnerability, including new federal safety net program restrictions and reduced funding for a wide range of programs and service systems.
- ▶ **Support deep engagement of immigrant community leaders and organizations in reform efforts.** While such support is important across all affordable housing concerns, it is particularly important in this area given the distinct barriers and forms of exploitation immigrants face as renters. Their expertise and networks should also be tapped to inform ongoing outreach and information dissemination efforts to ensure all tenants are aware of their rights and the housing standards that must be met, per municipal codes and federal and state housing laws.

3. Further develop and deeply weave nonprofit actors into state affordable housing initiatives

While the state is endeavoring to address housing affordability through a range of programs, each focused on different features of the crisis, its efforts do not approach the scale needed to meaningfully solve the problems that fuel or result from the affordability crisis. Clearly, restrictive local zoning measures are a key barrier to achieving scale, but successfully overcoming those barriers will still leave the state with mostly less-than-optimal prospects for creating affordable housing at the scale needed—much less housing that is durably affordable. This is due to the heavy reliance in Connecticut, as elsewhere, on developers that receive tax abatements and public subsidies to build mixed-income developments. The percentage of units set aside for affordable housing in such partnerships is typically small, and provisions maintaining the affordability of units are time-limited. Given that Connecticut's needs for affordable homes cannot be met

57 See, for example, ChangeLab Solutions, *Up to Code: Code Enforcement Strategies for Healthy Housing* (Oakland, CA: ChangeLab Solutions, 2015); Cities for Responsible Investment and Strategic Enforcement and Hester Street, *The Power and Proximity of Code Enforcement: A Tool for Equitable Neighborhoods* (New York City: Cities for Responsible Investment and Strategic Enforcement and Hester Street, 2019).

58 ChangeLab Solutions, *A Guide to Proactive Rental Inspections* (Oakland, CA: ChangeLab Solutions, 2022).

59 Stout, *Connecticut Eviction Right to Counsel: Annual Independent Evaluation, January 31 to November 30, 2022* (Hartford: Stout, 2022).

through the marginal appropriation of units from such developments, and as breakthroughs in the state's long standoff related to local zoning regulations appear achievable in light of the legislature's passage of the omnibus housing bill, there is an urgent need to build a corps of professional nonprofit partners to assist the state in pursuing more ambitious housing development goals.

The state has already supported small-scale efforts to build capacities among such partners; however, achieving ambitious construction goals and sustaining new housing will inevitably require many more. Creating vehicles to further leverage and scale the expertise of existing nonprofit partners while helping others build similar capacities is therefore a challenge that should quickly be addressed. Scaling up partners that can assist the state in expanding alternative housing models (such as land trusts and renter-owned communities) should also be a goal of such capacity-building efforts.⁶⁰ With the state's immigrant communities having a significant stake in the success of affordable housing initiatives, and the state likely to heavily rely on immigrant workers to realize its goals, Connecticut should not miss the opportunity to innovate and scale cooperatives and other alternative models that may uniquely tap immigrants' skills and aspirations, while simultaneously assisting the state in meeting its housing development and management needs.

Connecticut should not miss the opportunity to innovate and scale cooperatives and other alternative models that may uniquely tap immigrants' skills and aspirations, while simultaneously assisting the state in meeting its housing development and management needs.

⁶⁰ Kiara McGowan, "Your Guide to Alternative Models of Housing and Home Ownership," National Cooperative Business Association, August 2, 2024.

4 Issues Affecting Low-Wage Workers

Immigrants play a vital role in the low-wage workforce in Connecticut. Immigrants made up 28 percent of the low-income workforce in the state as of 2019–23, though they were only 20 percent of the low-income population.⁶¹ Notably, all of the growth in the size of the low-wage workforce in the state between 2006–10 and 2019–23 came from immigrant workers, without whom the low-wage workforce would have shrunk, slowing economic growth.⁶²

Looking at the main occupational categories of low-income immigrants in Connecticut, the largest share in 2019–23 (39 percent) worked in service occupations, followed by 17 percent in production, transportation, and material moving occupations, and 16 percent in natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations.⁶³ The specific occupations that were most common among low-income immigrant workers were maids and housekeeping cleaners, janitors and building cleaners, cashiers, construction laborers, and nursing assistants. However, the share of all low-income immigrants in each of these jobs was low (between 4 and 5 percent), indicating that low-income immigrants fill a wide range of occupations. Connecticut is also host to between 7,000 and 20,000 farmworkers each year, working in agriculture (tobacco, fruit orchards, vegetable farms) and dairy farms.⁶⁴

Despite the critical role they play in the state’s economy, immigrant workers, particularly low-wage workers, face persistent problems such as wage theft, unpredictable schedules, and discrimination. Notably, many of these issues also affect U.S.-born workers, so taking steps to address them would benefit native-born and immigrant workers alike. However, immigrant workers often face compounding challenges, including limited English proficiency, a lack of understanding of their rights in the workplace, and tenuous immigration statuses that can put them at risk of employer retaliation if they file a complaint. The chilling effect on immigrant workers’ ability to assert their rights, coupled with insufficient state mechanisms to investigate and address reports of labor violations, poses a key challenge for state policymakers and threatens to undercut working conditions for all workers in the state.

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A. Top Issues Facing Low-Wage Immigrant Workers in Connecticut

Immigrant and other low-wage workers in Connecticut face a range of challenges, from wage theft to unsafe or hazardous working conditions to unpredictable or varying scheduling. The agencies tasked with inspecting workplaces to ensure compliance with wage and hour, workplace safety, and other laws

61 Migration Policy Institute (MPI) analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS), pooled for 2019–23.

62 MPI analysis of pooled 2006–10 and 2019–23 ACS data.

63 MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data.

64 University of Connecticut, “Migrant Farm Worker Clinic Experience” (presentation, UConn Health, Farmington, CT, 2019).

are underfunded and overstretched, leaving long backlogs of unresolved complaints. Still, the state has made headway on some aspects of workers' rights, particularly in raising the minimum wage, though some workers are left out.

Minimum Wage

In 2019, Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont signed legislation tying the state's minimum wage to the percentage change in the federal employment cost index, meaning that the minimum wage must be adjusted each year.⁶⁵ Most recently, this increased the minimum wage from \$15.69 to \$16.35 per hour, starting on January 1, 2025.⁶⁶ From 2019 to 2023, Connecticut's wage growth was highest for low-wage workers (11.4 percent), likely due in part to the increase in minimum wage in the state.⁶⁷ Minimum wage laws cover workers regardless of immigration status, though unauthorized immigrants may not always be aware of their rights under the law. The minimum wage applies to agricultural workers and some domestic workers, but live-in domestic workers, casual babysitters, and those who provide "companionship services" to the elderly are not eligible.⁶⁸

As in most states, base minimum wage rates are lower for tipped workers than for non-tipped workers, but their tips must bring them to the minimum hourly wage or their employers are responsible for bridging the difference.⁶⁹ Labor rights advocates have argued, however, that tipped workers do not always receive their full minimum wage and fear speaking out and risking their jobs. Legislation to extend the same minimum wage to tipped workers, known as the "One Fair Wage" bill, has failed to come up for a vote in the legislature.⁷⁰

Ground Zero: Limited Capacity at the Connecticut Department of Labor

Connecticut's Department of Labor (DOL) faces fiscal constraints and a lack of sufficient staff, causing immense backlogs in complaints filed with DOL that are waiting for an investigation. Since 2017, the amount of wages recovered by DOL for workers who were underpaid has dropped precipitously after a period of relative growth since the 1980s.⁷¹ In 2024, just \$2 million in wages were recovered for Connecticut workers, slightly higher than the record low of \$1.9 million in 2023, but still considerably down from the \$8.9 million in 2017.⁷² A state audit conducted in 2021 and 2022 found that as of May 2023, DOL had more than 800 cases that had not been assigned for investigation.⁷³

65 State of Connecticut, *An Act Increasing the Minimum Fair Wage*, H.B. 5004, 2019 legislative session (January 9, 2019).

66 Office of Governor Ned Lamont, "Governor Lamont Announces Connecticut's Minimum Wage Will Increase to \$16.35 on January 1, 2025" (press release, September 27, 2024).

67 Patrick R. O'Brien, *The State of Working Connecticut 2024* (New Haven: Connecticut Voices for Children, 2024).

68 Agricultural workers ages 14–18 may be paid lower wages, with the minimum depending on the size of the operation, and workers ages 14–18 in other industries may be paid less than the state minimum wage during their first 90 days of employment. See Human Resource Consulting Group, "Connecticut Minimum Wage for 2025" (news release, January 1, 2025).

69 Human Resource Consulting Group, "Connecticut Minimum Wage for 2025."

70 Gabby DeBenedictis, "What to Know about CT Proposal to Eliminate Tipped Minimum Wage," CT Mirror, March 4, 2024.

71 José Luis Martínez, "Wage Theft Complaint Backlog Grows, but Dept. of Labor Lacks Staff," CT Mirror, August 4, 2024.

72 Martínez, "Wage Theft Complaint Backlog Grows."

73 State of Connecticut, Department of Labor, "Audit Summary: Department of Labor, Fiscal Years Ended June 30, 2021 and 2022" (fact sheet, State of Connecticut, Auditors of Public Accounts, Hartford, 2024).

Experts interviewed for this study noted that fiscal constraints in the state have meant that proposals to increase the number of DOL employees fail in the state legislature. In fact, the number of wage investigators and agents at the Connecticut DOL fell from 29 in early 2015 to 21 in June 2024.⁷⁴ The result is that workers wait six to eight months for a case to be assigned to an investigator, with even longer waits for an actual investigation. Staffing shortages also mean that DOL conducts very few prospective audits, meaning that if workers are not comfortable reporting abuses, they are very likely to go undiscovered. One interviewee noted that this creates ripe opportunities for employers to commit wage theft, given that accountability measures are virtually nonexistent.⁷⁵ When employers pay subminimum wages for immigrant workers or require long hours without paying overtime, this can put downward pressure on wages for all workers in the state, U.S.-born workers included.

Workers' Compensation and Workplace Conditions

In Connecticut, as in many states, workers are eligible to receive workers' compensation as a result of a workplace injury, regardless of their immigration status.⁷⁶ However, some benefits that require recipients to be "ready, willing, and able" to work may not be available to immigrants who are not legally authorized to work in the United States. And even when they have rights on paper, many immigrant workers, particularly unauthorized immigrants, fear the potential immigration consequences of presenting their workers' compensation claims. Many also struggle to navigate the bureaucratic workers' compensation process without an attorney.⁷⁷

Even when they have rights on paper, many immigrant workers, particularly unauthorized immigrants, fear the potential immigration consequences of presenting their workers' compensation claims.

More broadly, immigrant workers often face persistent hazardous or unsanitary conditions in the workplace. Immigrants work at higher rates than U.S.-born workers in jobs in construction, landscaping, and meat processing, where injuries are more common. Labor leaders interviewed during this study spoke of immigrant workers being assigned work involving dangerous chemicals or materials without proper protective gear or

training on the harms of exposure.⁷⁸ Throughout the state, news stories have also documented examples of immigrant workers having their employment terminated after raising concerns about health and safety issues in the workplace.⁷⁹ Such occurrences create a chilling effect, making others wary of raising issues

⁷⁴ Martínez, "Wage Theft Complaint Backlog Grows."

⁷⁵ Author interview with union official, December 12, 2024.

⁷⁶ State of Connecticut, Workers' Compensation Commission, *Workers' Compensation Information Packet* (Hartford: Workers' Compensation Commission, 2022); *Victoria Dowling v. Sol V Slotnik et al.*, No. 15711 (Supreme Court of Connecticut, May 26, 1998); *Angel Tuba Saquipay v. All Seasons Landscaping of Ridgefield, LLC*, No. 6332 CRB-7-19-5 (Compensation Review Board of Connecticut, January 31, 2020).

⁷⁷ Maricarmen Cajahuaringa, "CT Undocumented Workers Say They Face Challenges While Navigating Workers' Compensation," CT Mirror, February 10, 2024.

⁷⁸ Author interview with labor organizer, October 25, 2024.

⁷⁹ Maricarmen Cajahuaringa, "An Immigrant Worker Alleges Unsanitary Working Conditions and Low Wages at a Stamford Grocery Store," Connecticut Public Radio, August 3, 2023; Elizabeth L. T. Moore, "Injured New Haven Migrant Worker Disputes Eviction from Employer's Housing: 'We Also Have Rights,'" *New Haven Register*, February 26, 2024.

due to fear of retaliation, and leaving workers to suffer the detrimental health impacts of poor workplace conditions.

Issues Affecting Domestic Workers

Immigrants are greatly overrepresented in in-home employment, comprising more than one-third of all low-wage workers who provide in-home care services in Connecticut.⁸⁰ The great majority of Connecticut's immigrant in-home care workers—90 percent—are women. Nationally, in-home care workers may be excluded from certain minimum wage, anti-discrimination, and other workplace rights. Following the path five other states (California, Hawaii, Massachusetts, New York, and Oregon) had taken at the time, in 2015, Connecticut passed its own Domestic Worker Bill of Rights.⁸¹ The bill expanded domestic workers' rights to bring sexual harassment and discrimination complaints against their employers to the state Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities. Subsequent state legislation in 2021 mandated that employers develop a written agreement with workers on their hours, pay, responsibilities, and access to any paid days off.⁸²

Most domestic workers in Connecticut have access to the state minimum wage and to overtime pay, but those who live with their employer or provide companionship care are excluded. Due to major gaps in domestic workers' understanding of their rights under Connecticut law, in 2021, the state legislature appropriated \$200,000 to support nonprofit organizations' efforts to educate domestic workers about their workplace rights.⁸³ In 2024, the state enacted legislation that provides paid sick leave for all workers in the state, including domestic workers, with the provision reaching workers who are the sole employee of a particular employer starting in 2027.⁸⁴ In the wake of the murder of a home health aide in 2023, Connecticut established a state safety grant program to cover the costs of safety escorts and safety training for home health aides and technology to help aides access safety information about a client and to contact local law enforcement if needed.⁸⁵

Inconsistent Schedules for Hourly Workers

Low-wage workers throughout the state also often face challenges associated with unpredictable scheduling practices. This is particularly prominent in fast food and retail businesses, where employers are not bound to a set schedule and may change schedules last minute, creating uncertainty for their workers. Such scheduling practices affect workers' ability to arrange needed child care or care for other dependent family members, to balance multiple jobs, and to reliably earn enough to pay rent, buy groceries, or afford basic utilities.⁸⁶ Immigrants made up 35 percent of low-income workers in Connecticut's service sector

⁸⁰ MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data.

⁸¹ State of Connecticut, *An Act Concerning Domestic Service and the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities*, SB 446, Public Act No. 15-246 2015 General Assembly (June 30, 2015).

⁸² State of Connecticut, *An Act Concerning Provisions Related to Revenue and Other Items to Implement the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023*, Senate Bill No. 1202, 2021 General Assembly (2021).

⁸³ Brenda León, "As Connecticut Expands Labor Protections, These Volunteers Educate the Most Vulnerable Workers," Connecticut Public Radio, September 22, 2022.

⁸⁴ National Domestic Workers Alliance, "Connecticut Legislature Expands Paid Sick Leave, Marking Major Victory for Domestic Workers and Other Excluded Workers in CT" (press release, May 14, 2024).

⁸⁵ State of Connecticut, *An Act Concerning the Health and Safety of Connecticut Residents*, SB 1, Public Act No. 24-19, 2024 General Assembly (May 21, 2024).

⁸⁶ Make the Road Connecticut, "Letter from Barbara Lopez to the CT State Legislature," March 11, 2024.

in 2019–23,⁸⁷ making them a notable share of workers likely to be affected by such variable scheduling practices.

Legislation introduced to the Connecticut legislature in recent years would require employers with at least 500 employees to post work schedules two weeks in advance and to notify workers of schedule changes as soon as possible. The bills would also require employers to pay workers for cancelled or rescheduled work hours. Such bills have not yet come up for a vote in either chamber of the legislature.⁸⁸

B. Recommendations

Addressing immigrant workers' access to safe worksites, predictable work schedules, and protections against wage theft and other workplace abuses can improve not only their working conditions but also those of U.S.-born workers in the state. Connecticut has made headway on certain worker protections, and there is a strong advocacy base in the state for other expanded protections. The following recommendations could offer guidance to policymakers seeking to ensure that the proper mechanisms are in place to address workplace malpractice.

1. The state should make funding Department of Labor investigations a priority.

Budget constraints and a lack of political will have been equally blamed for the staffing shortages and immense backlogs in wage theft recovery at the Connecticut DOL. This has caused a significant reduction in recovered wages for workers throughout the state and created an environment in which employers may feel free to exploit workers. Investing in the necessary staff and budget to address the backlog of cases, ensure that new cases are heard in a timely manner, and conduct some randomized inspections is imperative. Connecticut could also consider prioritizing investigations for larger employers that operate in sectors where evidence nationwide shows that wage and hour compliance rates are lower, in order to have the biggest impact on working conditions in the state.⁸⁹

2. State officials should ensure immigrant workers have meaningful access to enforcement mechanisms to address workplace abuses.

Even if enforcement mechanisms are in place and adequately resourced, they will not yield the desired results unless workers—immigrant and U.S. born alike—are able to use them to report abuses. This includes wage theft, workers becoming injured on the job or facing unsafe conditions, and cases in which tipped workers earn less than the minimum wage and their employers do not make up the difference. Connecticut officials could do more to ensure that immigrant workers can access enforcement systems that are culturally competent, provide meaningful language access for those with limited English proficiency, and help them to understand and assess any risks they might face if they do not have durable legal status in the country.

⁸⁷ MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data.

⁸⁸ State of Connecticut, *An Act Concerning Predictable Scheduling*, SB 413, 2024 General Assembly, Reg. Sess. (2024); State of Connecticut, *An Act Concerning Advanced Notice of an Employee's Work Schedule to Certain Employees*, SB 831, 2025 General Assembly, Reg. Sess. (2025).

⁸⁹ Andrew Elmore and Muzaffar Chishti, *Strategic Leverage: Use of State and Local Laws to Enforce Labor Standards in Immigrant-Dense Occupations* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2018).

3. State-level organizations, nonprofits, and public entities should prioritize workers' rights education for immigrant communities.

One of the major hurdles to safeguarding workers' rights within Connecticut is the lack of knowledge among workers regarding what rights they are entitled to, regardless of their immigration status. Mistrust of government entities and fear of employer retaliation, job loss, or deportation can also keep immigrant workers, particularly those who are unauthorized, from speaking up about poor treatment or conditions in the workplace. While state agencies provide and disseminate information on workers' rights, they are not the primary source of information for many immigrant communities. Nonprofits, places of worship, and educational systems can play a role in educating immigrant workers about their rights in the workplace and about the systems that exist to help protect those rights.

4. The Connecticut attorney general's office could consider beefing up its enforcement of state labor laws, to supplement the work of the state DOL.

States around the country, including California, the District of Columbia, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania, have established workers' rights units within their state attorney general's office in order to dedicate specialized staff and resources to enforcing laws related to minimum wages, overtime pay, sick leave, workplace safety, child labor, and misclassification of employees as independent contractors, among other labor issues. The attorney general's office in Connecticut has a labor division,⁹⁰ but its duties are divided between defending the state before administrative bodies and in court and enforcing labor standards.

The Connecticut attorney general's office does not have jurisdiction for criminal prosecution, but it could more forcefully prosecute civil violations of labor laws, targeting employers who may take advantage of immigrants unaware of their labor rights.⁹¹ Attorneys general across the country have won large settlements to secure back pay or restitution for workers and hundreds of thousands of dollars in civil penalties to states.⁹² High-profile cases with sizable settlements can send a clear message to employers that breaking labor laws has real consequences, potentially deterring illegal and abusive practices. Local district attorneys across Connecticut could also consider taking a more active role in enforcing labor laws.

⁹⁰ Connecticut Office of the Attorney General, "Sections," accessed July 15, 2025.

⁹¹ Connecticut Division of Criminal Justice, "What Is the Difference between the Division of Criminal Justice (and the Chief State's Attorney) and the Attorney General?" updated May 17, 2024.

⁹² See, for example, Terri Gerstein, *How District Attorneys and State Attorneys General Are Fighting Workplace Abuses: An Introduction to Criminal Prosecutions of Wage Theft and Other Employer Crimes Against Workers* (Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute, 2021); District of Columbia Office of the Attorney General, "Attorney General Schwalb Announces Seven Settlements Protecting DC Workers and Important Workplace Rights" (news release, February 28, 2025).

5 Health Care and Social Assistance

Access to means-tested social assistance programs and affordable public insurance is often instrumental for low-income families struggling to meet basic needs for nutrition, health care, and stable housing. Research has demonstrated that such programs reduce poverty, improve physical and mental health outcomes, and promote educational and developmental advancements for children—all of which contribute to economic mobility and social integration.⁹³ However, immigration-status-related restrictions on access to public benefits programs—and misunderstandings of those rules—have long blocked many immigrant families from accessing needed supports. Under federal law, lawful permanent residents (LPRs, also known as green-card holders) who have held that status for five years are generally eligible for federally funded public benefits such as Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (food stamps) if they meet income and other program requirements, while unauthorized immigrants and temporary visa holders are ineligible for most federally funded public benefits.

While states cannot change the federal eligibility rules for means-tested programs, state governments can create state-funded programs to improve immigrant families' access to needed supports. Connecticut has opted to create state-funded replacement programs to provide cash assistance, food assistance, and public health insurance to some noncitizens who are excluded from federal benefits.⁹⁴ This section will focus predominantly on HUSKY, Connecticut's Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

Under current law, federally funded HUSKY is available to low-income U.S. citizens, refugees and asylees, and LPRs with at least five years in that status, along with smaller numbers of immigrants who are survivors of trafficking, Cuban/Haitian entrants, or in other humanitarian statuses. (Beginning in October 2026, refugees and asylees, survivors of trafficking, and some other smaller groups will lose access to federally funded health insurance coverage, due to provisions in the *One Big Beautiful Bill Act of 2025*.⁹⁵) In Connecticut, federally funded insurance is also available to LPRs who are children or pregnant and who have fewer than five years of U.S. residence, and CHIP funding can be used for prenatal care for pregnant individuals, regardless of immigration status.⁹⁶ State-funded HUSKY was extended in 2023 to children up to age 12 who are part of income-qualifying families and whose immigration status made them ineligible for federally funded insurance. In July 2024, HUSKY was extended to children age 15 and under.⁹⁷

93 Arloc Sherman and Tazra Mitchell, *Economic Security Programs Help Low-Income Children Succeed Over Long Term, Many Studies Find* (Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2017).

94 Connecticut provides cash assistance, similar to the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, to lawful permanent residents (LPRs) in their first five years in that status; such immigrants are ineligible for federally funded TANF. And Connecticut makes certain federally ineligible immigrant groups who have lived in the state for more than six months eligible to receive food assistance benefits at 75 percent of the standard federal amount under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), including certain Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) self-petitioners, T-visa applicants with bona fide determinations, and Special Immigrant Juvenile (SIJ) status and U-visa grantees who have adjusted to LPR status but not yet met the standard five-year residency requirement for SNAP. See Valerie Lacarte, Lillie Hinkle, and Briana L. Broberg, *SNAP Access and Participation in U.S.-Born and Immigrant Households: A Data Profile* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2023); Urban Institute, "Welfare Rules Database, Policy Tables," Table I.B.6, accessed February 24, 2025.

95 National Immigration Law Center (NILC), "New Law Limits Health Care & Food Aid for Immigrants," updated July 31, 2025.

96 Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF), "Medicaid/CHIP Coverage of Lawfully-Residing Immigrant Children and Pregnant Women, as of January 2025," accessed July 15, 2025; KFF, "Medicaid and CHIP Income Eligibility Limits for Pregnant Women as a Percent of the Federal Poverty Level, as of January 2025," accessed July 15, 2025.

97 Maricarmen Cajahuaringa, "CT Kids Ages 15 and Younger Now Qualify for Husky Health Care, Regardless of Immigration Status," Connecticut Public Radio, July 1, 2024.

Access to public health insurance ensures that low-income individuals can receive necessary medical care, preventing minor health issues from becoming severe and creating high costs for both households and medical providers. Connecticut hospitals faced \$239 million in uncompensated costs for care due to uninsured individuals (only a portion of whom are immigrants) in 2021, the latest year for which such information is available.⁹⁸

As of April 2025, nearly 920,000 individuals—immigrants and U.S. born—were enrolled in Medicaid or CHIP in Connecticut.⁹⁹ In 2019–23, 29 percent of low-income immigrants in Connecticut were uninsured, compared to 5 percent of low-income U.S.-born state residents.¹⁰⁰ Connecticut’s expansions of state-funded public health insurance to children covered about 15,000 children as of Spring 2025.¹⁰¹

Looking ahead, major changes to Medicaid eligibility rules and financing, and changes to tax credits available to those purchasing private insurance, are projected to reduce the share of both immigrants and U.S.-born individuals with health insurance coverage, greatly increasing costs to states.¹⁰² Many of these provisions will not take effect until 2026 or 2027.¹⁰³ When they do, they are likely to complicate state decision-making on how to help low-income residents of all backgrounds in seeking health insurance coverage and access to quality care.

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A. Key Trends and Challenges

Federally qualified health centers are central to providing health care to low-income and/or federally ineligible immigrant families.

Federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) are crucial to supporting low-income immigrant families in Connecticut, providing accessible health-care services at little to no cost, even to those lacking health insurance. These centers serve as vital resources for low-income and underserved populations, including immigrants, who often face barriers to accessing traditional health-care services. Seventeen FQHC providers (operating hundreds of sites) and additional look-a-likes in the state offer a wide range of services, including primary, dental, mental health, and preventive care, regardless of a patient’s immigration status or ability

98 Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission (MACPAC), *Annual Analysis of Medicaid Disproportionate Share Hospital Allotments to States* (Washington, DC: MACPAC, 2024).

99 Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, “March 2025 Medicaid & CHIP Enrollment Data Highlights,” accessed July 29, 2025.

100 Migration Policy Institute (MPI) analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS), pooled for 2019–23.

101 State of Connecticut, Data and Policy Analytics Unit, “CT Data—DSS Types of Assistance (TOA) Participation by Month CY 2012–2025,” accessed April 28, 2025.

102 Jennifer Scholtes, Robert King, and Benjamin Guggenheim, “GOP Megabill’s Final Score: \$3.4T in Red Ink and 10 Million Kicked off Health Insurance, CBO Says,” *Politico*, July 21, 2025; Rhiannon Euhus, Elizabeth Williams, Alice Burns, and Robin Rudowitz, “Allocating CBO’s Estimates of Federal Medicaid Spending Reductions Across the States: Enacted Reconciliation Package,” KFF, July 23, 2025.

103 KFF, “Implementation Dates for 2025 Budget Reconciliation Law,” accessed August 5, 2025.

to pay.¹⁰⁴ As rural hospitals in the state restrict their labor and delivery services, and major hospital groups expand increasingly privatized practices in metropolitan areas, FQHCs' presence in places where immigrant families live has become increasingly important for connecting them to health care.¹⁰⁵

Another example of public health-care services in Connecticut is school-based health centers (SBHCs), which play a significant role in supporting immigrant children by providing a direct health-care touchpoint in their schools. The more than 300 SBHCs in the state (many of which are also FQHCs) make it easier for children to access essential services such as vaccinations, physical exams, mental health support, and chronic illness management, without arranging transportation to a clinic or missing school.¹⁰⁶ SBHCs often employ bilingual/cultural staff (English–Spanish, most commonly), professionals who understand the unique needs of immigrant communities, work to build trust with families wary of engaging with institutions due to status insecurity, and encourage them to use non-emergency health-care services.¹⁰⁷

Changes may be ahead for some immigrants' access to FQHCs. In July 2025, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) issued a notice that the federal funding stream for FQHCs, the HHS Health Center Program, would now be considered a "federal public benefit," for which immigrant eligibility restrictions apply.¹⁰⁸ Under this policy change, only "qualified" immigrants—including naturalized citizens, green-card holders, refugees and asylees, and members of certain smaller humanitarian groups—would be eligible for FQHC services. Temporary work or student visa holders, unauthorized immigrants, Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders, and those with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) would be made newly ineligible for FQHC services. However, as of the time of writing, much remains to be seen about how this policy change will be implemented. By law, nonprofit organizations cannot be required to verify immigration status, and most FQHCs are nonprofit organizations. Litigation over this policy change seems likely.

Many immigrant households struggle to find affordable and timely specialized health care.

Beyond basic care, immigrant households in Connecticut face even more significant barriers to accessing specialized medical care. One of the primary challenges is a lack of insurance coverage, whether because an immigrant does not qualify for HUSKY or because their job does not provide employer-based insurance. Without coverage, the high cost of specialized care becomes a significant obstacle, leading many to forgo services such as preventive screenings or treatment for chronic conditions. And even for immigrants who are insured, language barriers can make it difficult to communicate effectively with health-care providers, understand medical instructions, and advocate for one's health needs in a specialist system that is unfamiliar and largely based on referrals.

104 A federally qualified health center (FQHC) look-a-like is a community health center that meets all the requirements to be considered an FQHC, but does not receive federal grant funding under the Health Center Program. See U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, "[HRSA Data Warehouse—Find A Health Center](#)," accessed July 29, 2025.

105 Author interview with health-care advocates, June 20, 2024; Katy Golvala, "[CT Approves Closure of Labor and Delivery at Johnson Memorial Hospital](#)," CT Mirror, November 14, 2024.

106 Cris Villalonga-Vivoni, "[Many Connecticut School-Based Health Centers Are Seeing a Rise in Student Visits](#)," CT Insider, October 20, 2024.

107 Author interview with health-care provider, June 24, 2024.

108 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "[HHS Bans Illegal Aliens from Accessing its Taxpayer-Funded Programs](#)" (press release, July 10, 2025).

Of the myriad medical specialization needs of immigrant patients, key stakeholders interviewed for this report highlighted two areas of particular concern: mental health support and maternal health services.¹⁰⁹ On top of the systemic barriers outlined above, the stigma and differences in cultural understanding surrounding mental and maternal health issues form an additional barrier. Further compounded by the limited number of bilingual providers, long wait times, financial constraints, and lack of providers accepting public health-care coverage, immigrant families often struggle to receive specialized care until an emergency surfaces. Periods of heightened fear about immigration enforcement can also deter immigrants without a secure legal status from seeking non-emergency medical care.

Transportation, housing, and language access are some of the most significant barriers to health care experienced by newcomers.

Transportation is a critical barrier to health care for many newcomers in Connecticut, as many immigrants rely on public transportation or lack access to reliable transportation.¹¹⁰ In an environment where health-care options, particularly for HUSKY patients, are decreasing due to clinic and hospital closures, some families may have to travel further to reach a facility that can accommodate them. Evidence suggests that individuals facing transportation barriers are more likely to delay or miss essential health-care visits, which can lead to worsening conditions and increased emergency response scenarios.¹¹¹ Similarly, housing instability complicates health-care access for immigrants—especially new arrivals—as lacking a permanent address can disrupt stable access to care from a regular provider, and environmental factors such as substandard housing can exacerbate existing medical conditions.¹¹² When housing is unstable, it also becomes more complicated to prioritize health care among other pressing needs, and studies have documented links between housing instability and higher morbidity.¹¹³

Language barriers, as mentioned above, present another significant obstacle, preventing many immigrants from effectively communicating with health-care providers or understanding their medical options. While health-care providers are required, under federal and state law, to facilitate access to their services for limited English proficient individuals,¹¹⁴ effective interpretation services are not always available, particularly for low-incidence languages. Often, family members are asked to provide interpretation, but they may lack the specialized medical vocabulary. Limited access to translation services and/or reimbursement for translation services can lead to misunderstandings, inadequate care, and a reluctance to seek medical assistance, leaving many immigrant families without the support they need to navigate the health-care system.¹¹⁵

109 Author interview with health-care advocates, June 20, 2024; author interviews with health-care providers, June 24, 2024 and June 29, 2025.

110 Author interview with health-care provider, June 24, 2024.

111 Samina T. Syed, Ben S. Gerber, and Lisa K. Sharp, “Traveling Towards Disease: Transportation Barriers to Health Care Access,” *Journal of Community Health* 38, no. 5 (2013): 976–993.

112 Author interview with health-care provider, June 24, 2024.

113 Lauren A. Taylor, “Housing and Health: An Overview of the Literature” (policy brief, Health Affairs, Washington, DC, 2018).

114 Mara Youdelman, “What Is Required under Title VI and Section 1557 to Ensure Language Access for Individuals with Limited English Proficiency?” National Health Law Program, May 9, 2024; State of Connecticut, “Interpreter Services and Linguistic Access in Acute Care Hospitals,” *Connecticut General Statutes*, Title 19a, Chapter 368v, Section 19a-490i (2024).

115 Mamata Pandey et al., “Impacts of English Language Proficiency on Healthcare Access, Use, and Outcomes among Immigrants: A Qualitative Study,” *BMC Health Services Research* 21 (2021): 741.

B. Recommendations

1. Adapt the public outreach and service delivery strategies of health-care programs to reflect the state's shifting demographic trends and immigration landscape

To effectively address the shifting demographics of Connecticut and its immigrant population, health-care programs must be nimble in adapting to translation and interpretation needs and to changing federal and state policies affecting health-care access for immigrants of varying immigration statuses. Because video and phone interpretation can inhibit trust and clear communication between providers and patients, effective communication with those not fluent in English can best be achieved by increasing the availability of in-person interpretation services, revising funding/insurance reimbursement structures for translation services, and expanding the use of multilingual health-care materials in low-incidence languages that are increasing in prevalence, such as Haitian Creole. In addition, health-care providers, postsecondary institutions, elected officials, and other stakeholders should continue to advance efforts to ensure that needs for bilingual and bicultural health-care workers are routinely tracked and incorporated into system planning and quality improvement initiatives.

To effectively address the shifting demographics of Connecticut and its immigrant population, health-care programs must be nimble in adapting to translation and interpretation needs.

Organizations that offer HUSKY enrollment assistance and health-care providers could also develop policies responsive to the increased variety of immigration statuses held by Connecticut residents, given larger numbers with statuses that fall in between legal and unauthorized immigrant categories, such as humanitarian parole, pending asylum claims, and TPS. This could include providing detailed information about who is and is not eligible for HUSKY and how that eligibility might change next year under recent federal legislation. It could also include carefully explaining to immigrants the circumstances under which information provided to the state in order to enroll in HUSKY might be shared with immigration enforcement agencies, in light of federal efforts to share federally funded Medicaid enrollees' personal information with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).¹¹⁶ To ensure that all those eligible for HUSKY are being enrolled, the state Medicaid office could conduct trainings to ensure staff are aware of the Medicaid eligibility of humanitarian populations admitted into the United States in recent years. And they could collaborate closely with immigrant-serving organizations, schools, and grassroots advocacy groups to increase the availability of information and enrollment touchpoints to new, underserved populations. Finally, funders and policymakers can support efforts to connect immigrants to health care through funding safety-net health-care services that are available to people who are uninsured, regardless of immigration status, including to meet pressing needs for maternal and mental health care.

¹¹⁶ Kimberly Kindy and Amanda Seitz, "Trump Administration Hands over Medicaid Recipients' Personal Data, Including Addresses," Associated Press, July 17, 2025. Data provided by enrollees in state-funded HUSKY is not shared with the federal government. As of the time of writing, a coalition of 20 state attorneys general, including Connecticut Attorney General William Tong, had filed suit to block this data sharing with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). See Connecticut Office of the Attorney General, "Attorney General Tong Sues Trump Administration for Illegally Sharing Personal Health Data with ICE" (press release, July 1, 2025).

2. Leverage local partnerships to advance more holistic service provision

To sustain more holistic, wraparound services that address the multifaceted needs of immigrant communities in Connecticut, health-care providers and the state Medicaid office could consider leveraging strategic partnerships between human services providers, community-based organizations, educational institutions, and other community institutions that are well-connected to vulnerable groups. Collaborating with trusted community organizations already serving immigrant populations can enhance service delivery and health-care outcomes by integrating social support systems such as legal assistance, housing, and employment resources. Policymakers and funders could consider resourcing partnerships between, for example, the Fairfield County-based nonprofit Family Centers and a community nutrition access organization, or between Yale School of Medicine and social services organizations.¹¹⁷ Such partnerships can create a seamless network of support that addresses medical needs and the social determinants of health that significantly affect immigrant communities.

3. Consider expanding HUSKY or private insurance eligibility to include all immigrants, regardless of status, and increase Medicaid reimbursement rates

While expansions to HUSKY have covered thousands of previously excluded noncitizen children, many noncitizen residents of the state are still left out.¹¹⁸ Extending HUSKY coverage to all individuals regardless of age and immigrant status would help improve all low-income families' access to needed medical care. Research suggests that this level of expansion would increase access to preventive care, decrease reliance on emergency care services, and improve overall economic and public health.¹¹⁹ Recognizing these benefits, several states (including California, Minnesota, and Oregon) and Washington, DC, have enacted policies to extend state-funded health insurance coverage to all residents, regardless of status.¹²⁰ (Some have recently scaled back their coverage or paused enrollment due to funding shortfalls.¹²¹) Alternatively, Connecticut could continue on its trajectory of iterative expansions of HUSKY coverage for noncitizens by age, prioritizing teens and young adults or older adults. To enable noncitizens to feel comfortable enrolling in state-funded public health insurance in the current environment, service providers may need to emphasize that while the federal government has sought data from states on Medicaid enrollees, this request does not extend to data on recipients of public health insurance solely funded by states. Enhanced state data privacy laws could also help uptake amid any future expansions.

The expansion of who is covered by public health insurance would require substantial investments by the state, as well as significant planning around expanding the network of providers accepting HUSKY. One way to grow this network would be to increase Medicaid reimbursement rates. A 2024 report by Connecticut's Department of Social Services found that the state's reimbursement rates are markedly lower than those of peer states,

¹¹⁷ Author interview with health-care provider, July 24, 2024.

¹¹⁸ Author interview with health-care advocates, June 20, 2024.

¹¹⁹ Gabriel Zieff, Zachary Y. Kerr, Justin B. Moore, and Lee Stoner, "Universal Healthcare in the United States of America: A Healthy Debate," *Medicina* 56, no. 11 (2020): 580.

¹²⁰ Valerie Lacarte, Julia Gelatt, and Ashley Podplesky, *Immigrants' Eligibility for U.S. Public Benefits: A Primer* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2024).

¹²¹ Akash Pillai, Drishti Pillai, and Samantha Artiga, "Recent State Actions Impacting Immigrants' Access to State-Funded Health Coverage and Other Public Programs," KFF, July 16, 2025.

suggesting the state is overdue for a revision to its rates.¹²² Higher reimbursement rates can incentivize more private providers to accept Medicaid patients, U.S. born and immigrant alike, enhancing access to quality care and reducing wait times for those relying exclusively on public services.¹²³ In 2025, Connecticut’s legislature allocated nearly \$80 million to increase Medicaid reimbursements to community health centers over the next three years, but the funding amount is contingent on federal reimbursement rates holding steady, and even the full increase falls short of what Connecticut’s health centers, clinics, and hospitals have been seeking.¹²⁴

Connecticut could also consider options to boost immigrant residents’ ability to purchase private insurance. Three states—Colorado, Maryland, and Washington—have found ways to open private health insurance markets to some immigrants without legal status, and Colorado provides subsidies for those with incomes below 300 percent of the federal poverty level. Washington had also offered subsidies, but ended their availability in 2025.¹²⁵ Under federal law, immigrants who are not lawfully residing in the United States are excluded from *Affordable Care Act* (ACA) health insurance exchanges and from associated subsidies for low-income individuals. However, Colorado has established a separate insurance exchange platform for excluded individuals and requires insurance companies that sell plans through the state’s ACA marketplace to also offer plans on this separate exchange. Washington State and Maryland have obtained a federal waiver that allows excluded immigrants to enroll in the states’ marketplaces.¹²⁶ Connecticut could likewise explore models to open more pathways to private insurance for immigrants of all immigration statuses, with or without also offering subsidies.

4. Consider other public benefits and tax credit expansions to support immigrant household well-being, following examples from other states

Connecticut has been a national leader in expanding the rights and benefits available to immigrants of all legal statuses. But other states have gone further in providing economic, health, and other supports to immigrants who are excluded from federal programs. For example, ten states now offer their state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) to residents who pay their income taxes using an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number—a number available to taxpayers who cannot access a Social Security Number, including many unauthorized immigrants. State EITCs can help to provide needed economic support to low-income immigrant families, helping them to cover basic living expenses.¹²⁷ Colorado, meanwhile, has established a state-funded alternative to federal unemployment insurance for workers who lose their jobs but do not qualify for unemployment insurance due to their immigration status.¹²⁸ Considering such examples, Connecticut could explore whether there are further ways to support the health and economic well-being of its immigrant families.

122 Connecticut Department of Social Services, Division of Health Services, *Phase 1 Report: Studies of Medicaid Rates of Reimbursement* (Hartford: Connecticut Department of Social Services, 2024); Katy Golvala, “CT Medicaid Underpays Many Health Care Providers,” CT Mirror, February 19, 2024.

123 Author interview with health-care advocate, July 31, 2024.

124 Governor Ned Lamont, “Governor Lamont Announces Agreement to Support Community Health Centers with Boost to Medicaid Reimbursement Rates” (press release, July 16, 2025); Katy Golvala, “Health Centers to Withdraw CT Medicaid Rate Petition after Budget Earmark” CT Mirror, June 10, 2025.

125 Akash Pillai, Drishti Pillai, and Samantha Artiga, *State Health Coverage for Immigrants and Implications for Health Coverage and Care* (San Francisco: KFF, 2024). Maryland’s coverage will start in November 2025.

126 Gabrielle Lessard, “On the Path Toward Health for All: Opportunities for States to Expand Access to Private Coverage through State Innovation Waivers” (policy brief, NILC, December 2023).

127 NILC, “Map of States that Offer Earned Income Tax Credits (EITCs) to Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITINs) Filers,” updated July 1, 2023.

128 Tanya Broder and Isobel Mohyeddin, *States Continue to Invest in the Health and Well-Being of Immigrants: Highlights from 2023* (Los Angeles, CA: NILC, 2024).

6 Immigrant Entrepreneurs and Small Business Owners

Immigrant entrepreneurs, those who start their own businesses, play an important role across the United States in expanding job growth, and Connecticut is no exception. According to the American Immigration Council, there were 47,400 immigrant entrepreneurs in the state as of 2023, representing more than 25 percent of all Connecticut entrepreneurs, and they contributed \$1.6 billion to the state's economy.¹²⁹ Research also shows that immigrant entrepreneurs play an outsized role in boosting the economic vitality of cities across the country.¹³⁰ Their overrepresentation among entrepreneurs is in part due to discrimination immigrants may face when applying for jobs and difficulties they may have in obtaining recognition for education credentials and work experience earned in other countries. Some studies also find that immigrants tend to have a higher propensity for risk-taking, an essential characteristic for entrepreneurship.¹³¹

Within Connecticut, small businesses created by immigrants are crucial to their local economies and meet myriad community needs. Typical businesses include restaurants, bakeries, salons, caregiving, and construction and contracting companies. These not only provide important services to the state's residents, they contribute to the revitalization of main streets in towns across the state and support the growth of middle class economies.¹³²

But immigrant entrepreneurs in Connecticut also face many challenges. In a 2024 *Forbes* study on the best state in which to start a business, Connecticut ranked 30th, with very low scores in financial accessibility, including access to capital or other funds to start a business.¹³³ Similarly, in a 2025 WalletHub survey, Connecticut ranked among the worst states in which to start a business because of high costs.¹³⁴ This section takes a closer look at both the impacts immigrant small business owners have on their local communities and the challenges they may face, drawing in part on interviews with nongovernmental organizations working with self-employed immigrants and immigrant business owners.

Immigrant entrepreneurs... play an important role across the United States in expanding job growth, and Connecticut is no exception.

A. Main Barriers for Immigrant Entrepreneurs

Immigrant entrepreneurs can face many barriers both in starting and successfully maintaining a business. Generally speaking, they may find it difficult to navigate the U.S. small business world due to the numerous,

¹²⁹ American Immigration Council, "Immigrants In Connecticut," accessed July 15, 2025.

¹³⁰ Saheel A. Chodavadia, Sari Pekkala Kerr, William R. Kerr, and Louis J. Maiden, "Immigrant Entrepreneurship: New Estimates and a Research Agenda" (working paper no. 32400, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, MA, May 2024).

¹³¹ Peter Vandor, "Research: Why Immigrants Are More Likely to Become Entrepreneurs," *Harvard Business Review*, August 4, 2021.

¹³² Erica E. Phillips and Renata Daou, "Immigrants Make up Growing Share of CT Labor Force," *CT Mirror*, November 3, 2024; Esteban Hernandez, "Immigrant Owned Businesses Help Shape Economy, Communities in Greater New Haven," *New Haven Register*, May 2, 2025.

¹³³ Kelly Main, "Ranked: The Best States to Start a Business," *Forbes*, October 15, 2024.

¹³⁴ Adam McCann, "Best and Worst States to Start a Business (2025)," *WalletHub*, January 20, 2025.

complex processes involved, which often require understanding and navigating many different government and nongovernmental entities (such as financial institutions and local regulatory agencies). This can be a far stretch from what some immigrants may be familiar with if they are coming from societies with an informal economy or less-regulated business environment.

Getting from an idea for a business to launching one requires mastering an entire “paper language” that many immigrants are unfamiliar with.

In starting a business, one of the biggest hurdles is accessing the capital necessary for the endeavor. This can pose a significant barrier for immigrants who lack the U.S. tax or credit history typically required to access traditional bank or government small-business loans. Furthermore, new businesses

must also contend with large regulatory bureaucracies that govern important operating parameters such as zoning, health and safety codes, and more. Challenges such as these, one interviewee noted, means that getting from an idea for a business to launching one requires mastering an entire “paper language” that many immigrants are unfamiliar with.¹³⁵

When it comes to maintaining a business, immigrants often face similar bureaucratic challenges. For example, one interviewee noted that many immigrants may come from a background where paper receipts sufficed for bookkeeping and tax codes were less extensive or entirely different.¹³⁶ Small business owners must also keep up with regulations (e.g., related to health and safety codes) that often change over time. Keeping up with those changes can be arduous for any small business, but particularly so if information about existing or new requirements is not available in one’s first language.

Interviewees also noted that some immigrants may be doubly disadvantaged because, in addition to business start-up and operating challenges, they may also be contending with limited proficiency in English, low literacy in their native language, and/or gaps in digital skills.¹³⁷ Navigating the language of business, particularly as a non-native speaker of English, was described as an immense challenge, especially in cases where there are not equivalent words, concepts, or processes in an individual’s native language. Interviewees also discussed the ways in which digital skills could compound language barriers, most notably with regards to the paperwork required to start a small business, which is generally completed online and in English.¹³⁸

B. State Entities Working to Support Small Businesses

Within Connecticut, there are three state entities that seek to support small businesses and their development: the state’s Small Business Administration (SBA), Small Business Development Center (SBDC), and the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD). These entities work in overlapping and interconnecting ways. For example, the SBA oversees the SBDC, which is a congressionally mandated program that must be housed at a university—in this case, the University of Connecticut. The SBDC gets its funding through the SBA, which receives funds allocated by Congress that the state

¹³⁵ Author interview with chief executive officer of a small business nonprofit, August 7, 2024.

¹³⁶ Author interview with chief executive officer of a small business nonprofit, August 7, 2024.

¹³⁷ Author interview with executive director of an economic development organization, August 6, 2024.

¹³⁸ Author interview with Small Business Development Center director and staff, August 7, 2024.

matches.¹³⁹ The SBDC serves a technical assistance role, helping aspiring business owners to understand the financing landscape, what options exist in the state, and more; other organizations also offer technical assistance on these and other topics. The DECD functions largely as a financial arbiter, providing loans for various businesses.¹⁴⁰

The Connecticut SBDC was described by interviewees as having expanded its efforts in recent years to reach a wider audience in the state, including immigrant communities, by partnering with local chambers of commerce and community foundations to market trainings or host events.¹⁴¹ The SBDC also began an international student webinar series, providing an overview of entrepreneurship in Connecticut.

These entities provide valuable support for aspiring entrepreneurs. But even with increased efforts to reach immigrant communities, additional tailoring of services will likely be needed to help individuals of diverse backgrounds and from across the state realize their ambitions to start small businesses. For example, though the SBDC provides technical assistance and help in understanding Connecticut’s small business rules and regulations, it does not provide one-to-one assistance in creating a business plan, a service that could be of value to aspiring entrepreneurs. Moreover, many state-affiliated programs were reported to often be looking to serve “big fish,” including technology companies or those likely to bring significant new investments and economic gains to the state, over smaller local businesses.¹⁴²

C. Local Organizations Addressing the Needs of Immigrants

The Migration Policy Institute (MPI) research team spoke with several organizations that seek to support immigrant small business owners and entrepreneurs. They provide assistance with a range of small business needs, including helping clients navigate and understand the state’s regulatory and tax systems and supporting them as they develop a business plan. The organizations also assist clients in applying for loans and/or guide them to grants, including specific grants offered by cities throughout the state.¹⁴³ In interviews, staff of these organizations reported offering guidance across multiple stages of the business life cycle, whether a business is in its nascent stages or seeking to shift its focus after years in operation.

International Hartford, for example, conducts market research with aspiring entrepreneurs, helps them navigate the legal landscape, develops business plans, discusses funding opportunities, and goes through the nuts and bolts of both setting up and maintaining a business.¹⁴⁴ Similarly, Latin Financial aims to help business owners navigate required paperwork, including for loans, regulatory necessities, bookkeeping, taxes, and more, including by bridging the language divide as the forms are often only available in English.¹⁴⁵ Upper Albany Main Street, primarily serving African and Caribbean communities, assists with business planning and paperwork but additionally focuses on community revitalization and brings together

¹³⁹ Connecticut Small Business Development Center, “Home,” accessed April 21, 2025.

¹⁴⁰ State of Connecticut, “Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development,” accessed April 21, 2025.

¹⁴¹ Author interview with Small Business Development Center director and staff, August 7, 2024.

¹⁴² Author interview with chief executive officer of a small business nonprofit, August 7, 2024.

¹⁴³ Hartford Chamber of Commerce, “Grants Available for Minority Small Businesses,” accessed April 21, 2025.

¹⁴⁴ For more information, see International Hartford, “About Us,” accessed July 15, 2025.

¹⁴⁵ For more information, see Latin Financial, “About Us,” accessed July 15, 2025.

small business owners to share updates.¹⁴⁶ And Building One Community examines labor market needs and attempts to match program participants to opportunities in specific sectors.¹⁴⁷

By offering assistance every step of the way, these nongovernmental organizations are able to help immigrants navigate the challenges all small business owners face and overcome barriers that often specifically affect immigrant communities. For example, while mainstream banks will not typically lend to businesses that lack a U.S. tax or credit history and thus appear too risky, these organizations have worked to establish relationships with banks willing to take on nontraditional clients, work with lenders outside the normal scope, and navigate grant or seed funding opportunities.

D. Recommendations

There are a number of steps government and other actors in Connecticut could take to improve support for immigrant entrepreneurs and small business owners, and thus support their vital contributions to the state's economy and communities. These include:

- ▶ **Bridge the gaps between state assistance programs and nongovernmental organizations' services, and support efforts to offer complementary assistance.** Immigrant entrepreneurs appear to seek out the aid of local nongovernmental organizations because they offer support at all stages of the business life cycle, from creating a business plan to complying with building codes and other regulations once a business has commenced operations. State-level assistance, on the other hand, acts more as a conduit for high-level information. These services, though different, are complementary, and state entities and nongovernmental organizations could do more to partner with each other to reach a wider audience. Ideally, partnerships based on complementarity could reduce the workload for all entities involved and enable each to focus on areas where they have unique strengths, while still allowing immigrant entrepreneurs to get the full range of valuable information they need.
- ▶ **Ensure that all materials are accessible in languages commonly spoken in the state.** One of the main obstacles identified by interviewees was that necessary applications and paperwork are generally only available in English. While navigating the language of business may be a persistent gap that nongovernmental organizations will continue to be called on to fill, government agencies (such as zoning, construction, and code compliance) and financial institutions could significantly lessen language barriers by providing important paperwork in a wider range of languages spoken within the state. This would decrease the need, within individual cases, to translate documents from English to a client's native language, while also making the technical contents of the documents more widely accessible.
- ▶ **Gather information on the needs of immigrant-owned and other small businesses in order to better target supports.** Improving collection of data on the needs of small businesses, including those owned by immigrants, would allow state and local organizations to better design and target their services. For example, interviewees noted gaps in digital literacy that can hinder some small

¹⁴⁶ For more information, see Upper Albany Main Street, "About Us," accessed July 15, 2025.

¹⁴⁷ For more information, see Building One Community, "Our History," accessed July 15, 2025.

business owners' use of bookkeeping and other software that can speed up business operations and support compliance with, for example, state and federal tax reporting. Yet trainings on how to use programs such as QuickBooks or Salesforce are not commonly made available or visible within small business support programs.¹⁴⁸ As relevant laws, industry codes, technologies, and the like change over time, having the means to quickly understand and respond to the needs these changes create among Connecticut small business owners could greatly enhance the effectiveness of state and local efforts to support small businesses.

Finally, federal small business policy, program, and funding changes undertaken by the Trump administration, as well as new immigration enforcement directives, will pose new challenges for some of Connecticut's aspiring immigrant entrepreneurs as well as those who already own and operate small businesses in the state. For example, many changes are unfolding at the U.S. Small Business Administration, including staffing and budget cuts, the elimination of certain grant programs, and more.¹⁴⁹ The impacts of these changes will no doubt be felt and monitored by the state, and efforts to ensure that Connecticut's small business sector can continue to thrive will be of paramount importance to the livelihoods of immigrant and other entrepreneurs and to the state economy as a whole.

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¹⁴⁸ Author interview with Small Business Development Center director and staff, August 7, 2024.

¹⁴⁹ U.S. Small Business Administration, "Small Business Administration Announces Agency-Wide Reorganization" (news release, March 21, 2025).

7 Immigration Legal Services

For immigrant families in Connecticut, and across the country, access to immigration legal services is often crucial for stability and for their ability to navigate complex immigration processes. This is true for immigrants with various legal statuses and lengths of U.S. residence. For example, individuals with protection needs may need help filing for asylum; migrants in removal proceedings may need legal assistance in immigration court; immigrants eligible for work authorization may need guidance on completing the necessary paperwork; and legal permanent residents and U.S. citizens may want to sponsor family members to come to the United States. Unlike in criminal proceedings, migrants in civil immigration proceedings do not have a right to government-funded counsel. But access to legal assistance is nonetheless vital for helping noncitizens apply for immigration statuses for which they are eligible and for ensuring meaningful due process in removal proceedings in immigration court.

Representation rates for migrants in removal proceedings are low. As of March 2025, just 25 percent of the 40,144 immigration court cases pending in Connecticut involved migrants with legal representation, ranking 36th out of all 50 states and the District of Columbia.¹⁵⁰ According to the Vera Institute of Justice, between 2018 and 2023, there were 115 cases in the Hartford immigration court involving people in immigration detention, and 56 percent were unrepresented.¹⁵¹ As the Trump administration ends grants of humanitarian parole for large groups, ends Temporary Protected Status (TPS) designations for nationals of certain countries, and works to arrest more unauthorized immigrants, the need for immigration legal services in Connecticut is growing.

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Though legal service providers have made some headway in meeting the needs of immigrants in the state, significant barriers remain. Geographic disparities and limited public transportation create service deserts. And capacity constraints due to limited funding, workforce size, and changing client needs make it difficult for organizations to keep up with demand. Changes enacted by the Trump administration, including major funding cuts, have had a jarring effect on legal service providers and reduced immigration legal services capacity in the state. The full impact of these changes is still unfolding.

A. The Landscape of Immigration Legal Services in Connecticut

Within the state, affordable legal services are primarily provided by nonprofit, nongovernmental organizations. Some of these providers focus exclusively on immigration legal services, while for others, such services are a small part of their portfolio. There are also private immigration lawyers in the state, though interviewees noted that many are cost-prohibitive and warned of some bad actors, such as *notarios* who make false promises and charge high fees.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ These data are for representation during any part of a case, whether a single phase or the duration of the case. See Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC), “[Pending Court Cases by Immigrant’s Address](#),” accessed May 23, 2025.

¹⁵¹ Vera Institute of Justice, “[The Movement for Deportation Defense: Information Hub](#),” accessed April 23, 2025.

¹⁵² Author interview with immigration attorney, August 7, 2024.

Different types of legal services also require different levels of resources. For example, a naturalization application is much less time-intensive than seeing a defensive asylum claim through immigration court—a complex process that can take months or years and may be emotionally taxing for legal service providers, given the high stakes and potential for a client’s deportation.¹⁵³ As a result, access to representation in immigration court proceedings is more limited than access to assistance with applications to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) such as for lawful permanent residence (often called a green card), naturalization, or even affirmative asylum claims. Only some immigration legal service providers in Connecticut will take on any removal defense cases, and most are only able to commit to a relatively small number of cases at a time.¹⁵⁴

Geographic accessibility and transportation pose two logistical hurdles to legal services for immigrants in the state. The majority of legal service providers are located along the shoreline (in Fairfield and New Haven Counties), with others scattered throughout the state in cities such as Hartford and New London. Outside of these larger cities, affordable legal services are often unavailable or extremely limited. The state’s meager public transportation system makes accessing services all the more difficult. Since the only immigration court and USCIS office are located in Hartford, in-person hearings and appointments require practitioners and clients from most parts of the state to travel for more than an hour.

Funding constraints often dictate the breadth of services.

Interviewees repeatedly noted that demand for legal services far outweighs supply.¹⁵⁵ The nongovernmental organizations that provide immigration legal services in Connecticut receive their funding from a patchwork of sources, including funding from foundations and religious institutions, some federal dollars for specific humanitarian populations, and grants and donations. Funds for family-based immigration and naturalization services are more widely available, while funding is much more limited for defensive claims (often asylum) in immigration courts. To supplement this funding, some organizations use sliding-scale fees to charge clients for services based on their ability to pay.

Given changes since the start of the second Trump administration, many federal funds have come to a halt, leaving organizations on the ground scrambling to quickly reorient to the new funding reality. Yet other funding sources also come with limitations. Donations from private individuals are often sporadic and vary in dollar amount, and funding from foundations is usually time-limited and geared towards specific legal services.

Legal service providers in Connecticut have been able to access some federal funding for services to immigrants lawfully in the country, though many of these funding streams may be winding down or facing cuts. For example, some organizations mentioned receiving funding via the *American Rescue Plan Act* and the Legal Services Corporation, dispersed through the state. The latter can generally only be used to provide legal services for lawful permanent residents, refugees and asylees, and immigrants who have applied for

¹⁵³ Defensive asylum claims are those filed by persons in removal proceedings as a defense against deportation, while affirmative claims are those filed with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services by individuals not in removal proceedings. For more information, see Kathleen Bush-Joseph, *Outmatched: The U.S. Asylum System Faces Record Demands* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2024).

¹⁵⁴ Author interview with immigration attorneys, July 7, 2024; author interview with community organizer, March 13, 2025.

¹⁵⁵ Author interviews with immigration attorneys, June 24, 2024, July 10, 2024, July 15, 2024, and August 7, 2024.

permanent residence, but services related to domestic violence, trafficking, or assault may be provided regardless of immigration status in certain circumstances.¹⁵⁶

The federal Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) has been funding local service providers to provide legal services for Afghan and Ukrainian parolees and at times has provided limited funds that can be used to help refugees more generally to apply for permanent residence and citizenship. The federal government had also provided funding for legal representation for unaccompanied minors in government custody, though the Trump administration has moved to end the contracts funding this work.¹⁵⁷ Federal funding has been available to support services to survivors of trafficking, which can include legal services.¹⁵⁸ And USCIS has funded organizations to assist legal permanent residents seeking to naturalize, though the Trump administration has also moved to end these contracts.¹⁵⁹

Connecticut has rarely devoted any state taxpayer funds to immigration legal services. However, some organizations receive funding through an interest on lawyers' trust account—a type of account lawyers use to temporarily hold settlement or damages payments or other types of client funds, the interest on which is dedicated to various legal services programs in the state.¹⁶⁰

Organizations also face funding challenges related to operational needs integral to their legal services. As the origins of immigrants in Connecticut have diversified, so too have their interpretation and translation needs, but specific funding for those services remains limited. Moreover, many organizations have difficulties recruiting and retaining staff. Connecticut's location between Boston and New York creates high attrition rates, with lawyers leaving the state for higher pay in those metropolitan areas. Organizations may also struggle to fund the hiring of full legal teams including paralegals and legal assistants, meaning lawyers are doing the full work of their cases, further stretching thin capacity.

Policy changes and backlogs at the federal level reverberate down to Connecticut communities, shaping service needs.

In addition to funding, immigration legal service providers in Connecticut, like others throughout the United States, must continuously adapt to changing federal policies that shape immigrants' legal status opportunities. For example, as the Biden administration expanded who was eligible for TPS (a limited form of protection for migrants from certain designated countries who are present in the United States and unable to return their countries due to natural disasters, conflicts, or other conditions), service providers turned attention to TPS applications. And for migrants temporarily allowed into the country through

¹⁵⁶ National Immigration Law Center (NILC), *Overview of Immigrant Eligibility for Federal Programs* (Los Angeles: NILC, 2024).

¹⁵⁷ In January 2025, the Justice Department halted various funding streams for nonprofits that provide legal advice or representation for certain noncitizens facing removal proceedings, including unaccompanied children. The nonprofits sued and in July 2025, a federal court ruled in the Justice Department's favor, permitting the termination of contracts for legal services, however an appeal is ongoing. See Holly Straut-Eppsteiner and Hillel R. Smith, *Immigration Court Legal Access Programs: Terminations and Related Litigation* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2025), 2.

¹⁵⁸ For example, the Trafficking Victim Assistance Program and Aspire: Child Trafficking Victim Assistance Program, through the federal Office of Trafficking in Persons, provides funding for case management services, which can include legal services. And the Justice Department's Office of Victim Services funds comprehensive services for trafficking victims.

¹⁵⁹ Litigation over these grant terminations is ongoing. See Democracy Forward, "Court Allows Trump's Dismantling of Citizenship and Integration Grant Program to Continue as Case Moves Forward" (press release, May 20, 2025).

¹⁶⁰ For more information, see Connecticut Bar Foundation, "IOLTA/IOTA," accessed April 23, 2025.

humanitarian parole, service providers were often called on for assistance with submitting applications for work authorization. Now that the Trump administration has taken steps to end parole protections for large numbers of recent entrants and end certain TPS designations, service providers are focused on exploring other legal status options for which their clients may qualify, including by filing asylum applications. As federal policies continue to change, so too will the focus of this work.

Other challenges are long-standing. The backlogged and at times unpredictable U.S. immigration system means that both applications to USCIS and immigration court cases can stretch on for years.¹⁶¹ These prolonged timelines make it hard for legal service providers to commit to taking on additional cases, or to find pro bono attorneys willing to commit to cases with indefinite durations.¹⁶² In other cases, clients may have a short timeframe until their court date or be close to the one-year asylum filing deadline and need immediate assistance that lawyers cannot accommodate. Immigration court processes introduce additional complexities. Under the Biden administration, court practices meant to reduce the growing backlog had unintended consequences for legal practitioners. Last-minute case closures and efforts to speed up the adjudication of certain cases (such as those of families who crossed the southwest border without authorization) made representation in immigration court more challenging. Now, under the Trump administration, new practices including the closure of certain asylum cases before they receive a hearing, arrests made by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in immigration courts, and attempts to put migrants into a faster removal process called expedited removal are demanding increased time and expertise from attorneys.

Working across state agencies presents unique challenges for immigration legal service providers.

Immigration legal service providers must often work directly or indirectly with various state agencies. When working with a client to apply for a U or T visa (for victims of crime or trafficking, respectively), practitioners often need to work with local law enforcement to obtain the required certification that the individual has been the victim of a qualifying crime and has been or is likely to be helpful to authorities' investigation. Interviewees described having varied working relationships with local police departments across the state, with some more willing to participate in such cases than others.¹⁶³

Legal service providers also described other state agencies such as the Department of Motor Vehicles as lacking sufficient language access measures to effectively work with individuals with limited English proficiency or having misinformed clients on what services they can access. For example, although immigrants in Connecticut (as in many other states) can access state driver's licenses regardless of their status, some interviewees expressed concern that a bad experience at the Department of Motor Vehicles could affect an immigrant's access to a license and that an arrest for driving without a license could put them at risk of deportation or affect their future immigration claims.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ For an in-depth discussion of these challenges, see Muzaffar Chishti et al., *At the Breaking Point: Rethinking the U.S. Immigration Court System* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2023); Julia Gelatt, *Unblocking the U.S. Immigration System: Executive Actions to Facilitate the Migration of Needed Workers* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2023).

¹⁶² Author interview with immigration attorney, August 7, 2024.

¹⁶³ Author interviews with immigration attorneys, June 24, 2024, July 3, 2024, and July 10, 2024.

¹⁶⁴ Author interview with immigration attorney, June 13, 2024.

Some organizations are exploring creative solutions to legal services barriers.

Since legal services are in greater demand than capacity allows, many organizations are turning to creative solutions to reach a larger number of clients. Some organizations have started offering limited representation, meaning they work on part of a client's case but do not represent them for its full duration.¹⁶⁵ This can allow attorneys to take on more clients in the short term, without worrying about whether they have the capacity to follow up with each and every case over the long term. This may mean assisting a client with an application but not representing them in court.

Amid drastic changes in immigration policy and enforcement at the federal level, including ramped up immigration arrests, and high levels of anxiety in immigrant communities, some organizations are adjusting their models in an attempt to get accurate information to as many people as possible. This includes offering pro se (self-representation) clinics, where immigrants can fill out an asylum application with some assistance and have it reviewed by an attorney, and large-scale clinics for simpler types of applications such as for employment authorization documents.

One such initiative is the Red Folder Project, which helps noncitizens prepare a packet of information to be used in the event they are detained, including emergency contacts, copies of relevant immigration documents, standby guardianship agreements for children, and more.¹⁶⁶ Recognizing that the scale of available legal services is insufficient to meet community needs, advocates are focusing on providing know-your-rights information and helping noncitizens feel prepared in the event of an arrest, detention, or deportation.¹⁶⁷ A related example is the state-generated Family Preparedness Plan guidance developed by state agencies and offered by the governor's office.¹⁶⁸ This packet, available in nine languages, provides recommendations of plans parents might make in case they are detained or deported, including which documents to gather, how to complete a standby guardianship agreement, and ideas for detailed information they might want to share with a future guardian. It also provides suggestions for vetting a potential immigration attorney.

Legal service providers in Connecticut have also begun meeting and developing ideas for how they can best coordinate to expand their reach in the face of greater need. These efforts include working to develop greater integration among providers to share resources and best practices; expanding community outreach and education; developing coordinated networks and perhaps even a coordinated workflow; and collaborating in identifying and advocating for sustainable public and private sources of funding for legal services.

The state has a large grassroots advocacy base around immigration matters that has pushed forth substantial changes, but critical gaps remain.

There have been a number of advocacy efforts related to expanding immigration legal services within Connecticut, resulting in varying levels of success. Between 2019 and 2021, advocates made several

¹⁶⁵ Author interviews with multiple immigration attorneys, July 3, 2024.

¹⁶⁶ 211 Connecticut, "[Program to Aid Those Facing Deportation – East Hartford – 3-12-2025](#)," accessed August 4, 2025.

¹⁶⁷ Author interview with community organizer, March 13, 2025.

¹⁶⁸ Governor Ned Lamont, "[Immigration Resources: Family Preparedness Plan](#)," accessed August 4, 2025.

attempts to establish a universal representation program for clients in the state before the efforts splintered. Related to these efforts, two bills were introduced in the legislature to enhance noncitizens' access to legal counsel in immigration proceedings, though neither advanced.¹⁶⁹ In 2021, the City of Hartford launched a program to offer universal representation to Hartford residents in removal proceedings, funded by city general funds.¹⁷⁰

BOX 1

Case Study: Universal Representation in New York Deportation Proceedings

Unlike in criminal cases, where defendants who cannot afford an attorney receive the help of a publicly appointed lawyer, migrants who are in immigration proceedings (which are civil in nature) and facing deportation are not appointed counsel. They have the right to an attorney at their own expense, though it is often cost prohibitive. Nationally, 42 percent of immigration court cases completed in the first three months of 2025 involved unrepresented individuals.

The universal representation model adopted in some jurisdictions seeks to address this gap by providing legal assistance to every person facing deportation proceedings who cannot afford an attorney. Income-eligible migrants receive legal assistance regardless of the merits of their case, and if they are ineligible for relief from deportation (such as asylum), attorneys advise migrants on options for voluntarily departing the United States.

New York City established the first universal representation program in the nation for detained migrants in 2014, and a number of studies have deemed it a success in advancing due process and fairness. In 2013, New York City allocated \$500,000 to pilot the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project, providing legal representation for low-income immigrants in deportation proceedings. In 2014, the City Council provided \$4.9 million to expand the project. While not all immigrants receive representation, the project aims to serve those who cannot afford it themselves, are detained, and face deportation proceedings in a New York immigration court.

Since 2017, the project has also served immigrants detained in upstate New York, with state lawmakers and private groups providing additional funding. The Vera Institute of Justice administers the program, and local nonprofit organizations provide legal representation. Studies have repeatedly found that legal representation initiatives such as the Family Unity Project have significant benefits for local communities and their economies, including by “keeping workers in the workforce, getting new arrivals work authorization, keeping families together, and providing pathways to upward mobility,” in the words of the Office of the New York City Comptroller.

Sources: U.S. Department of Justice, Executive Office for Immigration Review, “[Current Representation Rates](#)” (fact sheet, April 4, 2025); Office of the New York City Comptroller, [Economic Benefits of Immigration Legal Services](#) (New York City: Office of the New York City Comptroller, 2024); Vera Institute of Justice, “[The New York Immigrant Family Unity Project](#),” accessed April 23, 2025; The Bronx Defenders, “[New York Immigrant Family Unity Project](#),” accessed April 23, 2025.

¹⁶⁹ A 2019 bill sought to fund immigration legal services for unaccompanied children in removal proceedings, while a 2021 bill sought to establish a right to counsel for everyone in removal proceedings. See State of Connecticut, [An Act Concerning Access to Legal Counsel for Children in Immigration Removal Proceedings](#), SB 991, 2019 legislative session (February 28, 2019); State of Connecticut, [An Act Concerning Access to Legal Counsel for Children and Other State Residents in Immigration Removal Proceedings](#), SB 524, 2021 legislative session (January 27, 2021).

¹⁷⁰ Alex Putterman and Hartford Courant, “[Hartford Initiative Provides Money for Legal Representation for Residents Facing Deportation](#),” *Hartford Courant*, April 10, 2022.

The state's *Trust Act* limits law enforcement cooperation with federal immigration enforcement.

Since its initial passage in 2013, Connecticut's *Trust Act* has limited local law enforcement's cooperation with ICE. Specifically, the *Trust Act* bars local law enforcement from holding migrants past their criminal sentence for ICE to take custody and from sharing release dates and times with ICE, except in narrow circumstances (such as for those with certain felony convictions).¹⁷¹ In 2019, the *Trust Act* was adjusted to expand the definition of law enforcement to include bail commissioners and probation officers and to require law enforcement to inform an individual when ICE requests their continued detention.¹⁷²

As written, the *Trust Act* lacks meaningful repercussions for violations of its provisions. Immigrant advocates pushed in 2025 for the state legislature to add enforcement mechanisms to the *Trust Act*, along with data privacy protections for immigrants.¹⁷³ At the same time, Republicans in the state legislature sought to change the act to allow local law enforcement to share information with ICE on a broader set of crimes and to share this information at the point of arrest rather than waiting for a conviction.¹⁷⁴ Ultimately, the state passed a law that allows individuals to sue local governments over *Trust Act* violations, expands the set of law enforcement officials covered by the act (to include juvenile probation officers, members of the Board of Pardons and Paroles, and state prosecutors), and adds 13 crimes to the list of convictions for which local law enforcement are allowed to share information with ICE.¹⁷⁵ With news of the federal government seeking access to state-collected data on Medicaid enrollees, food assistance recipients, and voters,¹⁷⁶ Connecticut advocates continue to press state legislators to pass data privacy protections for Connecticut residents in future legislative sessions.

B. Recommendations

Immigration legal services play a pivotal role both in immigrants' ability to navigate complex immigration processes and in the efficiency and fairness of legal proceedings. There are various options legal service providers, funders, state and local leaders, and other stakeholders in Connecticut could consider to expand the reach and impact of such services. These include:

1. Increase funding for legal services through flexible funding streams that can be adapted to community and organization needs

Insufficient funding was identified across interviews as one of the top barriers to legal service provision within the state, often dictating the type and breadth of services that organizations can offer. Funders could

¹⁷¹ State of Connecticut, *An Act Concerning Civil Immigration Detainers*, Public Act No. 13-155, *Connecticut Statutes of 2013*, Chapter 965 (2013).

¹⁷² Steven Stafstrom, "Legislature Passes Trust Act Bill to Lamont for Protecting Undocumented Immigrants," Connecticut House Democrats, May 30, 2019; Emilie Munson, "ICE Detention Procedures Spark CT Capitol Debate," CT Post, March 8, 2019; State of Connecticut, *An Act Concerning The Trust Act*, Public Act No. 19-20, *Connecticut Statutes of 2019*, Chapter 965 (2019).

¹⁷³ State of Connecticut, *An Act Concerning the Trust Act*, Raised Bill No. 7212, 2025 Legislative Session (March 12, 2025).

¹⁷⁴ Mike Cerulli and Juliana Lepore, "Republicans Call for Changes to 'Trust Act,' Possibly Impacting How Connecticut Law Enforcement Works With ICE," News 8, Jan 24, 2025.

¹⁷⁵ Emilia Otte, "CT Lawmakers Pass Expanded Trust Act," CT Mirror, May 27, 2025; State of Connecticut, *An Act Concerning Revisions to Various Statutes Concerning Criminal Justice*, Public Act No. 25-29, *Connecticut Statutes of 2025*, Chapter 961 (2025).

¹⁷⁶ Kimberly Kindy and Amanda Seitz, "Trump Administration Hands over Medicaid Recipients' Personal Data, Including Addresses, to ICE," Associated Press, July 17, 2025; Jude Joffe-Block, "The USDA Wants States to Hand over Food Stamp Data by the End of July," National Public Radio, July 19, 2025; Emily Badger, "States Have More Data About You Than the Feds Do. Trump Wants to See It," *New York Times*, August 1, 2025.

consider offering more flexible options, including by providing organizations with general operating funds rather than funds dedicated to specific types of staff or specific client characteristics. Some organizations need more lawyers, others need more funding for translation, and still others need more legal support staff (paralegals and legal assistants); flexible funding can enable organizations to channel resources to meet these varied needs. Additional funding to support higher salaries for attorneys, or other sweeteners such as tuition assistance, could help Connecticut organizations compete with opportunities in New York and Boston. Moreover, with several law schools located throughout the state, investments in a professional pipeline for people who are rooted and want to stay in Connecticut could be helpful to combat attrition rates.

Some organizations need more lawyers, others need more funding for translation, and still others need more legal support staff (paralegals and legal assistants); flexible funding can enable organizations to channel resources to meet these varied needs.

Notably, Connecticut has rarely provided state revenue funding for immigration legal services. Particularly as federal funding reductions have caused Connecticut nonprofits to cut their legal services staff, precisely as immigrants are in greater need of legal assistance, the state could consider funding immigration legal services to ensure due process for all state residents placed into removal proceedings and the ability of immigrants in the state to secure more-durable forms of legal status, when available to them. Such funding could be broad, adding Connecticut to the group of ten states that fund immigrant removal defense,¹⁷⁷ or be targeted more narrowly to immigrants who have some form of legal status or to particular types of legal assistance needs.

2. Continue to explore creative solutions to support legal representation amid capacity challenges

Connecticut organizations are continually adapting their approaches to address the legal service needs of state residents against the backdrop of a rapidly changing immigration policy landscape. Nevertheless, demand for legal services continues to outstrip the available supply. Therefore, stakeholders should continue exploring measures to increase access to legal services and information despite these capacity limitations.

Ongoing efforts to expand know-your-rights and pro se clinics and to provide limited representation can offer a basic level of legal orientation and assistance to a greater number of individuals. Continued exploration of workflow models of legal assistance, in which different actors are responsible for different components of a case, could also potentially help to expand capacity. For example, this could mean making use of origin-country conditions reports put together by organizations around the country and collected in a shared repository, bringing in social work students from local universities to collect affidavits as part of their clinical training, and reserving lawyers' time for the portions of cases where their legal expertise is most needed. A workflow model could also involve coordinating among organizations to allocate cases

¹⁷⁷ See Vera Institute of Justice, "[The Safety and Fairness for Everyone \(SAFE\) Network](#)," accessed April 23, 2025. This year, Massachusetts appropriated \$5 million for an immigrant legal defense fund for the coming fiscal year. See Chris Van Buskirk, "[Gov. Maura Healey Approves \\$5 Million for Immigrant Legal Defense Fund in FY26 State Budget](#)," *Boston Herald*, July 8, 2025.

or specific tasks based on their staff's capacity, availability for representation (even on a limited basis), and areas of expertise.

In addition, greater use of support from non-lawyers—whether social workers, administrative staff, Department of Justice-accredited representatives, or paralegals—will be vital in a period of high demand and limited funding. Finally, outreach to areas of the state with fewer legal service providers and to immigrant populations that speak languages other than English and Spanish will also be important.

3. Provide clearer information to state entities that play a role in immigration cases and strengthen relationships between them and legal service providers

For immigrants applying for specific visas, such as U visas for victims of crime and T visas for victims of trafficking, cooperation between legal service providers and local law enforcement is paramount. Yet, legal service providers report encountering limited willingness on the part of some agencies to cooperate. Providing guidance to law enforcement agencies across the state about the role they play in these visa

Providing guidance to law enforcement agencies across the state about the role they play in these visa processes, as well as building bridges between legal service providers and law enforcement agencies, could thus help resolve these cases more efficiently and effectively.

processes, as well as building bridges between legal service providers and law enforcement agencies, could thus help resolve these cases more efficiently and effectively. To achieve these goals, state leaders with experience in immigration issues could work to provide educational materials to relevant agencies, allowing their staff to ask questions and clear up confusion. State leaders could also help to foster better communication between legal service providers and local law enforcement so that each group better understands the others' priorities and needs.

As legal service providers work to address and adapt their services to the changing policy landscape, coordination with schools, financial institutions, and other relevant entities could help prepare clients who are at risk of deportation for the possibility of being removed to their countries of origin. Many legal service providers already offer critical support in the form of know-your-rights presentations and assistance with preparing documents necessary for an immigration court case to defend against removal. At the same time, potential removal raises other needs, such as to obtain U.S. school records for children restarting their education in another country, ensure continued access to financial assets, access medical records, and more. A state-led and coordinated effort among institutions doing this type of preparation work would decrease duplication and help ensure that noncitizens at risk of detention and deportation are prepared across all aspects of their lives.

8 K-12 Schools and Immigrant-Background and English Learner Students

Connecticut's immigrant-background student population has grown significantly over the past two decades. Between 2000 and 2023, the share of school-age children with at least one foreign-born parent nearly doubled, rising from slightly more than 15 percent to 30 percent.¹⁷⁸ This growth is most evident in the towns of Bridgeport, Stamford, and Danbury, where immigrant-background children now make up more than half of the child population.¹⁷⁹ These children, some of whom are U.S. born while others are immigrants themselves, are served by a state education system that ranks 5th in the United States for “adequacy,” meaning it spends above the necessary level to meet test score goals, but 47th in the nation for equal opportunity; this is due to funding inequities between the state’s high-need, high-poverty school districts versus high-wealth districts, which contribute to a marked achievement gap in terms of students’ test scores in these districts.¹⁸⁰

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For decades, U.S. law and policy have held that it is a fundamental right of all children to have equal access to education.¹⁸¹ Educational attainment not only shapes individual students’ future opportunities but also influences the broader economic and social development of their families and the communities in which they reside. Civil rights law protects immigrant children’s enrollment in school and also requires educators to provide them meaningful access to the same curriculum as all other students. Systems for these children are typically organized around their needs as English Learners (ELs),¹⁸² though EL and immigrant students are not categories that perfectly overlap. Accountability measures under federal law aim to ensure that schools are supporting ELs to make progress toward English proficiency and—equally—toward broader academic measures such as high school graduation.

Connecticut ELs are supported at the state level by laws and guidance that align with research on effective EL education. Most notably, Connecticut is one of only a handful of states requiring that bilingual education programs be available in specific circumstances.¹⁸³ These programs have a long history in the state owing to advocacy on behalf of Puerto Rican students in the 1960s and 1970s, which sought more effective instructional programs for these children and recruitment of specially trained teachers to staff them.¹⁸⁴

178 Migration Policy Institute (MPI) Data Hub, “State Immigration Data Profiles: Connecticut—Demographics & Social,” accessed February 27, 2025.

179 Renata Daou, “Which CT Towns Have the Most Children of Foreign-Born Parents?” CT Mirror, January 31, 2025.

180 School Finance Indicators Database, “State School Finance Profile: 2021-22 School Year—Connecticut” (data profile, Albert Shanker Institute, University of Miami School of Education and Human Development, and Rutgers Graduate School of Education, Washington, DC, Miami, and New Brunswick, NJ, 2025).

181 Julie Sugarman, *Legal Protections for K-12 English Learner and Immigrant-Background Students* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2019).

182 Note that Connecticut uses the term English Learners/Multilingual Learners to refer to students identified using the federal definition. This section uses the federal term English Learners (ELs) throughout.

183 In Connecticut, the requirement applies to schools that have at least 20 ELs who speak the same language.

184 Cerda-Ocampo, “La Escuela: Start, End, and Future” (post by professor and students of Educ 300: Education Reform, Past and Present, Trinity College, May 4, 2019).

Yet, as will be discussed below, background research and interviews with school and community leaders conducted for this report indicate that despite EL students comprising a significant share of the state's students for many decades, EL outcomes do not reflect the generally high achievement of Connecticut students, and districts are inconsistent in their efforts to implement quality EL programs.

Outside of the instructional program context, many immigrant-background children face a range of socioeconomic factors that have been demonstrated to affect educational outcomes.¹⁸⁵ Many of their parents are low-income and have limited levels of formal education, both characteristics that can affect parents' efforts to support their children's academic success.¹⁸⁶ Furthermore, Census data from the 2019–23 period showed that 17 percent of immigrant-led households with children in Connecticut were linguistically isolated, meaning that all members of the household over the age of 14 spoke English less than “very well.”¹⁸⁷ Low proficiency in English can limit parents' ability to communicate with school staff, understand information provided by the school, and advocate for their children's needs.¹⁸⁸

In the same time period, 28 percent of immigrant parents in Connecticut were low income, compared to 17 percent of U.S.-born parents,¹⁸⁹ meaning they could face greater difficulties affording their children's

Schools and community groups often must make additional efforts to partner with parents, providing them with information and resources to help them navigate local systems and effectively support their child's academic journey.

access to supports such as tutoring, technology, and extracurricular activities. Additionally, Connecticut's immigrant parents were four times more likely than U.S.-born parents to lack a high school diploma or equivalent, comprising almost 60 percent of parents in the state without one.¹⁹⁰ Combined with the fact that they may not have attended school in the United States themselves, many immigrant parents may lack familiarity with the state's education system, including kindergarten-readiness

expectations, parents' roles and rights in selecting schools and instructional programs for their children, graduation requirements, and the like. As a result, schools and community groups often must make additional efforts to partner with parents, providing them with information and resources to help them navigate local systems and effectively support their child's academic journey.

Connecticut has adopted several policies and created new initiatives over the past five years in response to some of these challenges. In 2021, the state required that districts include parents and guardians in the development of student success plans for their child and mandated that schools provide a Black and

185 Pamela E. Davis-Kean, “The Influence of Parent Education and Family Income on Child Achievement: The Indirect Role of Parental Expectations and the Home Environment,” *Journal of Family Psychology* 19, no. 2 (2005): 294–304; Sean F. Reardon, Joseph P. Robinson, and Ericka S. Weathers, “Patterns and Trends in Racial/Ethnic and Socioeconomic Academic Achievement Gaps,” prepublication draft later published in *Handbook of Research in Education Finance and Policy*, 2nd Edition, eds. Helen F. Ladd and Margaret E. Goertz (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015).

186 MPI analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS), pooled for 2019–23.

187 MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data. English proficiency is self-reported in the ACS, whether “very well,” “well,” “not well,” and “not at all.” Data on linguistically isolated households exclude individuals living in group quarters.

188 Ileana Najarro, “Language Barriers Keep Parents from Attending School Activities, New Data Show,” *Education Week*, December 4, 2024.

189 MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data.

190 MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data.

Latino studies course for high school students, reflecting a commitment to parent partnerships and cultural inclusivity.¹⁹¹ The following year, the state introduced a peer-to-peer mental health support program and required family care coordinators in each school district to coordinate student access to mental health resources.¹⁹² The 2023 legislative session saw the passage of a Parent Bill of Rights for English Learners/Multilingual Learners and the inclusion of world languages as a part of the K-8 model curriculum.¹⁹³ And in 2024, the state took steps to address long-standing concerns related to equity in school funding, implementing a student-centered funding formula that allocates resources based on the individual needs of students, regardless of where they live.¹⁹⁴

Research conducted for this study sought to take into account recent measures such as these and the broader policy and funding contexts shaping K-12 education in the state, while focusing most heavily on the capacities of school, district, and state systems to provide quality instructional support to ELs and assist immigrant parents in understanding school processes and how they can support their children's academic success and future life goals. This section provides information on EL student numbers, geographic distribution, and performance along with analysis of key system challenges in the areas of EL instructional quality as well as access and system capacities for effective and meaningful communication with parents. This research benefited greatly from insights shared in interviews with school leaders, system administrators, and staff of community initiatives that serve or engage immigrant-background students and parents. The recommendations offered focus primarily on steps that should be taken to ensure that education leaders at the school, district, and state levels have the technical support and capacities needed to actualize the goals of existing state policies intended to support the success of immigrant-background students.

A. System Capacity to Provide Quality Instructional Programs for ELs

An important first step toward assessing system capacity and challenges in the areas of EL instructional quality is understanding the characteristics of EL students in Connecticut. This section provides information on EL enrollment, top languages, top districts, and academic performance.

Demographics

Despite a 4.9 percent drop in enrollment in the general student population in Connecticut in recent years, EL enrollment increased by more than 17,000 students between school years 2016–17 and 2023–24, and the EL share of all students in the state increased from 6.8 percent to 10.5 percent (see Figure 1). Over this period, the share of ELs who were Spanish speakers held steady at about 72 percent, while the share of Portuguese speakers nearly doubled, from 4.4 percent to 7.5 percent (see Table 1). The number of Arabic and Haitian Creole speakers (the third and fourth largest language groups) increased slightly over that time period, while the number of Mandarin speakers (the fifth largest group in school year 2016–17) slightly decreased. Pashto rose into the top fifteen languages in school year 2019–20 and has continued to increase since then, reaching fifth place in 2023–24. Ukrainian speakers also entered the top fifteen in 2022–23.

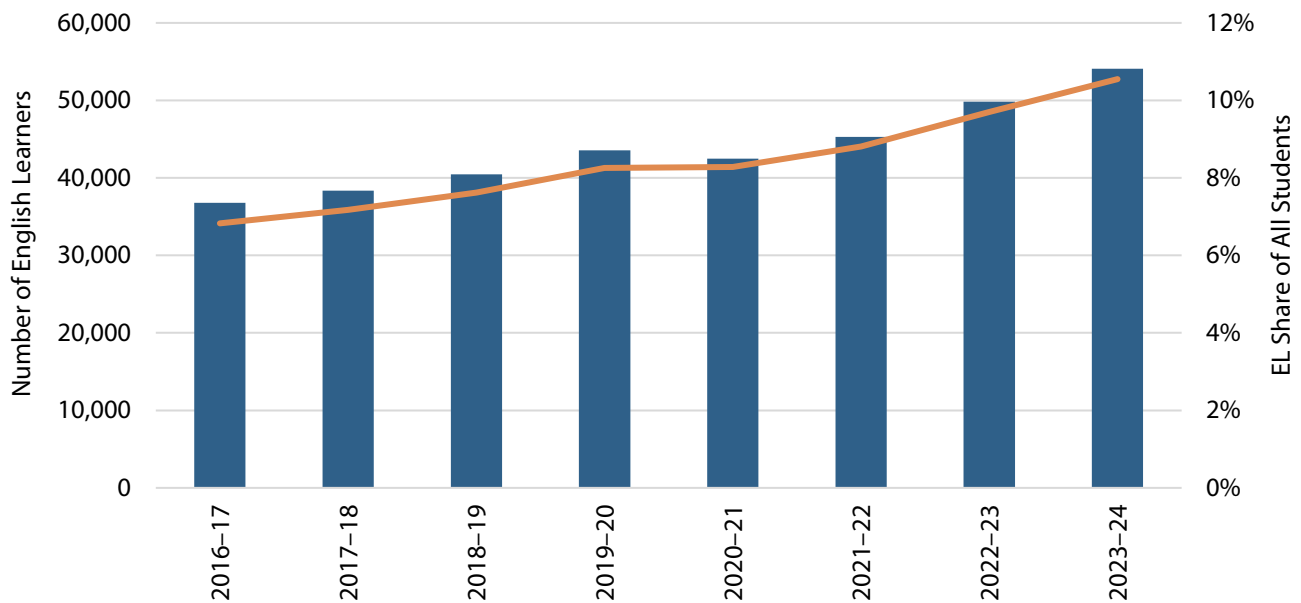
191 School Law Practice Group, “2021 Education Legislation Summary,” Shipman & Goodwin LLP, August 17, 2021.

192 School Law Practice Group, “2022 Education Legislation Summary,” Shipman & Goodwin LLP, July 26, 2022.

193 School Law Practice Group, “2023 Education Legislation Summary,” Shipman & Goodwin LLP, August 3, 2023.

194 School + State Finance Project, “Snapshot: K-12 Education Funding in Budget Stabilization Bill (H.B. 5523),” updated July 15, 2025.

FIGURE 1

Number of ELs and EL Share of All Students in Connecticut, School Years 2016–17 to 2023–24

Source: State of Connecticut, “EdSight—Enrollment Dashboard,” accessed December 2, 2024.

TABLE 1

Top 15 Languages Spoken by Connecticut ELs, School Year 2023–24 versus School Year 2016–17

Language	School Year 2023–24			School Year 2016–17		
	Count	Percent	Rank	Count	Percent	Rank
Spanish	38,890	71.9%	1	26,349	72.1%	1
Portuguese	4,029	7.5%	2	1,616	4.4%	2
Arabic	1,385	2.6%	3	1,162	3.2%	3
Haitian Creole	949	1.8%	4	755	2.1%	4
Pashto	713	1.3%	5	*	*	*
Mandarin	642	1.2%	6	660	1.8%	5
Ukrainian	544	1.0%	7	*	*	*
Albanian	522	1.0%	8	406	1.1%	8
Polish	497	0.9%	9	474	1.3%	6
Urdu	497	0.9%	10	421	1.1%	7
Bengali	315	0.6%	11	215	0.6%	12
Russian	311	0.6%	12	202	0.5%	13
Tamil	281	0.5%	13	*	*	*
Vietnamese	278	0.5%	14	307	0.8%	9
French	274	0.5%	15	264	0.7%	10
All others	3,951	7.3%		3,348	9.1%	
Total	54,078	100.0%		36,789	100.0%	

* Not among the top 15 languages in school year 2016–17

Sources: Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), *The Condition of Education in Connecticut, 2016–17* (Hartford: CSDE, n.d.); author email correspondence with Michael Sabados, Education Consultant, CSDE, November 19, 2024; EdSight, “Enrollment Dashboard.”

As is the case in most states, ELs are disproportionately enrolled in urban districts. However, as of school year 2022–23, 88 percent of Connecticut’s local education agencies¹⁹⁵ served at least five ELs. The districts serving the greatest number of ELs that year were Bridgeport, Danbury, Hartford, and New Haven School Districts (see Table 2).

Performance

Evaluating EL academic performance can be complicated due to the revolving nature of the EL subgroup: once students are proficient in English (and more likely to pass academic tests in English) they exit the subgroup, and newly arriving ELs (who are less likely to pass tests in English) join the group each year. Nevertheless, ELs are included in federal accountability calculations, and Connecticut duly publishes metrics related to their performance on standardized tests in grades 3 to 8 and 11, progress toward English proficiency, graduation rates, and other measures.

When comparing the academic achievement of ELs to non-ELs (a group that includes those former ELs who have been reclassified after passing English proficiency tests), state standardized test results show wide gaps in performance. While these gaps reflect ELs’ still-developing English proficiency, the value of the comparison is to see if schools are providing accommodations in instruction and in assessment practices that allow ELs to demonstrate what they know about academic content. Indeed, in school year 2023–24, just over 10 percent of Connecticut ELs scored proficient in state English language arts and math standardized tests, compared to roughly half of non-ELs.¹⁹⁶ Looking at a nationally comparable measure of academic knowledge and skills, Connecticut ELs tend to score lower than the EL national average on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, given annually to a sample of students across the country.¹⁹⁷

Results from the state’s annual assessment of ELs’ English language development are mixed. On the positive side, data show that about 15 percent of ELs scored proficient in English in school year 2023–24.¹⁹⁸ With research suggesting that students typically take five to seven years to become proficient, a rate between 14 and 20 percent would be in line with that trend. However, only 31 percent of ELs made progress toward English proficiency that year.¹⁹⁹

TABLE 2

Top Ten Local Education Agencies Serving ELs in Connecticut, School Year 2022–23

School District	Number of ELs
Bridgeport School District	5,672
Danbury School District	4,608
Hartford School District	4,451
New Haven School District	4,327
Waterbury School District	3,753
Stamford School District	2,989
Norwalk School District	2,554
New Britain School District	1,992
Meriden School District	1,666
West Haven School District	1,272

Source: ED Data Express, “[Data Download—File Specification 141, ELs Enrolled](#),” accessed February 6, 2025.

¹⁹⁵ Local education agencies include school districts, independent charter schools, and state-run schools.

¹⁹⁶ State of Connecticut, “[EdSight—Smarter Balanced Achievement/Participation](#),” accessed February 6, 2025.

¹⁹⁷ Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), “[Connecticut NAEP 2024 Math and Reading Results](#)” (PowerPoint presentation, CSDE, Hartford, January 29, 2025).

¹⁹⁸ State of Connecticut, “[EdSight—LAS Links Achievement](#),” accessed February 6, 2025.

¹⁹⁹ State of Connecticut, “[EdSight—LAS Links Growth](#),” accessed February 6, 2025.

ELs in the ten Connecticut school districts serving the highest number of ELs (shown in Table 2) tend to perform below average in the achievement of English proficiency, with eight districts posting rates of 8 to 12 percent (Danbury and West Haven School Districts being the two scoring close to or above the state average of 15 percent).²⁰⁰ The same is true for progress toward proficiency, with the same eight districts showing only 21 to 29 percent of ELs making progress, and Danbury and West Haven at or above the state average of 31 percent.²⁰¹ It is important to note that while districts with larger numbers of ELs can benefit from a concentration of specialized resources, in all ten districts, more than 50 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price meals (a measure of low socioeconomic status, which can also affect students' academic success).

Finally, in school year 2022–23, 73 percent of Connecticut ELs graduated high school in four years, compared to 90 percent of non-ELs. As is typical of national trends, Black and Hispanic students in Connecticut had lower four-year graduation rates (82 and 81 percent, respectively) than Asian and White students (96 and 93 percent). Likewise, students qualifying for free school meals graduated at a lower rate (80 percent) than students eligible for reduced-price meals (90 percent) or not eligible for either (94 percent).²⁰²

B. Opportunities to Enhance State Support for ELs

States are responsible for setting the conditions for student success in schools and districts, while operating within federal civil rights laws. In Connecticut's case, state law and policy support ELs through measures such as the following:

- ▶ required bilingual instruction in schools with 20 ELs who speak the same language
- ▶ supplementary state funding, including
 - the Bilingual Education Program Grant, which provides a total of \$3.8 million to schools with bilingual programs, allocated per eligible pupil
 - a 25 percent weight added to the state per-pupil formula grant for all ELs
- ▶ the state seal of biliteracy, recognizing high school graduates attaining the English language arts credits required for graduation and proficiency in another language
- ▶ a Parent Bill of Rights for English Learners/Multilingual Learners.²⁰³

Additionally, Connecticut's State Department of Education (CSDE) has developed numerous guides for districts to consult as they develop EL instructional programming,²⁰⁴ and the department is working toward

²⁰⁰ State of Connecticut, "EdSight—LAS Links Achievement."

²⁰¹ State of Connecticut, "EdSight—LAS Links Growth."

²⁰² National Center for Education Statistics, "Table 219.46. Public High School 4-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR), by Selected Student Characteristics and State or Jurisdiction: School Years 2011-12 through 2021-22," updated January 2024; State of Connecticut, "EdSight—Four Year Graduation Rates," accessed February 6, 2025.

²⁰³ CSDE, "English Learners/Multilingual Learners in Connecticut's Public Schools: Guidelines for Administrators" (guidance, CSDE, Hartford, 2024); CSDE, "Parent Bill of Rights for English Learners/Multilingual Learners" (guidance, CSDE, Hartford, n.d.).

²⁰⁴ CSDE, "17 Ways the CSDE Is Supporting Multilingual Learners" (guidance, CSDE, Hartford, June 20, 2022).

a statewide EL framework to provide additional guidance on developing and sustaining systems to support research-based instruction, teacher training, monitoring of student progress, and other areas. All of these resources exist within a sociocultural context that is generally supportive of immigrant communities and approaches such as bilingual education, which can be an asset for drawing community support for initiatives to strengthen educational programs for immigrant and EL students.

Connecticut underinvests in supporting educators of ELs.

As a state with a high level of local control over curriculum and instruction, Connecticut does not prescribe particular approaches or models for EL instruction. Only one CSDE staff member works full time on EL instruction, and that position focuses largely on compliance with state and federal law as opposed to providing systemic technical assistance on effective programs and practices to districts. Regional education service centers across the state provide direct assistance to districts, but not all centers are adequately staffed to provide expertise in EL programming and instruction. This results, as some interviewees noted, in some district and school leaders having little support to plan and evaluate their EL programming and instruction.

The state's lack of systemic support for administrators seemingly extends to teacher preparation as well, creating gaps in how educators are equipped to serve ELs. There is only one approved educator preparation program in Connecticut at the undergraduate level offering certification in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and bilingual education,

This results, as some interviewees noted, in some district and school leaders having little support to plan and evaluate their EL programming and instruction.

and three with graduate programs in one or both areas.²⁰⁵ Interviewees noted that many districts report shortages of experienced and certified EL teachers, especially for bilingual programs, and this has been substantiated in CSDE's annual analysis.²⁰⁶ In fact, bilingual programs may request permission to hire certified TESOL teachers instead of bilingual teachers if they cannot find suitable candidates, which is reported to be common.²⁰⁷ Programs for general education teachers may also fall short, as there are no specific requirements for the amount or type of EL coursework in Connecticut teacher preparation programs.²⁰⁸ There are some private, nonprofit organizations such as the Multistate Association for Bilingual Education, Northeast (MABE) that can help fill gaps in teacher training through workshops and conferences, but these are accessed through individual initiative rather than being part of statewide programming.

In sum, educators with deep expertise working with ELs are too few in number in K-12 school, district, regional, and state administration and in institutions of higher education to be able to meet needs across all districts and effectively support needed systemic improvements in EL instruction and program design. Particularly in light of recent statewide policies that require ELs to have access to grade-level curriculum

²⁰⁵ CSDE, "Guide to Approved Educator Preparation Programs in Connecticut" (fact sheet, CSDE, Hartford, January 2025).

²⁰⁶ CSDE, "Shortage Areas," accessed April 23, 2025.

²⁰⁷ Education Commission of the States, "English Learner Policies: State Profiles—Connecticut," updated May 2020.

²⁰⁸ Jeanine Pocoski and Kelly Michel, "Additional English Learner Course Requirements for Preservice Teachers," *Journal of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies* (Fall 2020 special issue).

and bilingual programming, state efforts to develop and expand educator expertise at the classroom and administrator levels are urgently needed in two key areas:

- ▶ **Technical assistance and monitoring.** CSDE and regional educational service centers will need additional expert staff able to support schools and districts in implementing EL and bilingual program models and instruction that meet the expectations and requirements set forth in existing state policies.
- ▶ **Pre-service teacher preparation.** Increasing the number of institutions of higher education with the capacity to prepare teachers of ELs, especially bilingual certified teachers, is also critical to expanding system capacities commensurate with needs for provision of effective instructional programming at scale in the state.
 - With teacher preparation funds targeted for significant cuts at the federal level, Connecticut will likely need to fund specific initiatives to hire teacher educators with expertise in TESOL and bilingual methods and develop new coursework to meet the demand for bilingual educators.
 - To improve consistency across institutions of higher education, the state could convene a higher education/preK-12 committee to collaborate on initiatives to improve teacher preparation.

Despite pockets of excellence, the nature and quality of instructional programs vary.

Although CSDE makes recommendations for how program models such as dual language, transitional bilingual, newcomer, and English as a second language support should operate, program design and quality are enormously varied across the state. Private organizations such as MABE, the Connecticut Association of Bilingual and Bicultural Education (CABBE), Connecticut Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (ConnTESOL), and Connecticut Administrators of Programs for English Language Learners (CAPELL) increasingly serve a critical role of bringing education leaders together to share ideas and problem-solve, but they do not have the resources or authority to address the challenge of bringing best practices to scale across the state.

For example, dual language instruction has been recognized for decades as the most effective model for accelerating ELs' academic achievement. Yet, despite being a state with mandated bilingual instruction, Connecticut has very few dual language programs. According to MABE, New Haven and Windham are the only school districts operating multiple one-way and two-way models in their schools,²⁰⁹ and Hartford, New Britain, Stratford, and Waterbury have a single two-way program.²¹⁰ Additional information indicates Norwalk has five total one- and two-way programs and there is a two-way program in New London, suggesting Connecticut has approximately 25 programs overall.²¹¹ In contrast, Oregon—a state with

209 One-way dual language programs enroll primarily ELs who are speakers of the partner language (such as Spanish), and two-way models enroll a balance of ELs speaking the partner language and fluent English speakers who may or may not have a family connection to the partner language.

210 Multistate Association for Bilingual Education, Northeast, "[Northeast Region Directory of Dual Language Education Programs](#)," accessed February 15, 2025.

211 Author personal communication with Megan Alubicki Flick, English Learner/Multilingual Learner Consultant, CSDE, April 30, 2025.

comparable-sized EL and overall student populations—has 140 dual language programs in 34 districts, most of which are two-way models.²¹²

In a state where, in school year 2024–25, there were 62 districts and 366 schools that were required to provide bilingual instruction in nine languages,²¹³ the apparent under-utilization of dual language models raises urgent questions about the state’s lack of strategies to support the scaling of effective models. Outside of dual language, the type of bilingual programming varies enormously, including transitional bilingual, individual classes offered in students’ native languages, or even support from bilingual paraprofessionals. And as noted above, schools that cannot find bilingual instructors may provide support using TESOL-certified teachers. There are many ways to provide native language support in an English-only context, including providing books and software in students’ languages, encouraging students to draft written work in their native language, and including native language messages in classroom environmental print. But these proxies do not offer the benefits associated with well-structured dual language and transitional bilingual programs, which provide instruction in literacy and content areas in the partner language.²¹⁴

CSDE and the state legislature have come a long way in recent years, producing numerous policies and guidance documents that outline best practices in program design. However, implementation of those

Within districts, a sense of shared responsibility and development of systems requiring ELs to be centered in educational planning create a much stronger foundation for effective teaching than approaches where ELs are an afterthought and EL teachers have to improvise solutions.

approaches generally relies on heroic efforts by individual administrators to create, implement, and sustain those programs, and even then, interviewees report when leadership transitions occur, programs may be discontinued if their value is not fully communicated or understood. Within districts, a sense of shared responsibility and development of systems requiring ELs to be centered in educational planning create a much stronger foundation for effective teaching than approaches where ELs are an afterthought and EL teachers have to improvise solutions.²¹⁵

Thus, to ensure policymakers’ intent is realized and effective EL program designs are implemented at scale within Connecticut, state leaders will need to create the means to understand where such capacities are weak or nonexistent and grow them—in other words, to create and sustain an implementation design for the policies they have (rightly) set forth. The forthcoming release of the new statewide EL framework could

212 Oregon Department of Education, *English Learners in Oregon: Annual Report 2022-23* (Salem, OR: Oregon Department of Education, 2024); Oregon State University, “[Directory of Dual Language Bilingual Programs in Oregon](#),” accessed April 16, 2025.

213 In school year 2024–25, there were mandated bilingual programs serving children speaking Arabic, Haitian Creole, Nepali, Pashto, Portuguese, Spanish, Tamil, Telugu, and Ukrainian. See CSDE, “[Recent Communication—Mandated Bilingual Programs for SY 2024-2025](#),” updated May 23, 2024.

214 Dual language programs provide at least 50 percent of instruction in the partner language for at least five to seven years. Transitional bilingual programs may provide up to 90 percent of instruction in the partner language for a short period, increasing the amount of English used across a program of one to three years.

215 Margarita Calderón and Shawn Slakk, “[Taking the Holistic Approach](#),” *Language Magazine*, March 14, 2017; Hayley Weddle, Megan Hopkins, Rebecca Lowenhaupt, and Sara E. N. Kangas, “Shared Responsibility for Multilingual Learners across Levels of the Education System,” *Educational Researcher* 53, no. 4 (2024): 252–61.

be leveraged to launch such an effort. Mirroring other states that have faced similar needs to review and understand EL program design and implementation challenges,²¹⁶ Connecticut should convene a legislative task force (or other such statewide review committee) to examine the existing educational programs and resources its districts and schools are using to support EL and immigrant student success, the obstacles they face in bringing quality designs to scale, and steps that should be taken to facilitate optimal scaling.

Given the challenges identified in this section, the task force should particularly focus on:

- ▶ how many bilingual programs lack staff to provide a robust transitional bilingual or dual language program;
- ▶ the number of general education teachers with and without training on EL instruction;
- ▶ the capacity of schools to provide targeted and linguistically appropriate support to ELs through school counseling services, wrap-around services (such as those provided in full-service community schools), and specialized instructional services including special education, gifted and talented programs, and intervention systems;
- ▶ obstacles reported by EL administrators, coaches, teachers, and other education administrators in implementing and sustaining quality instructional designs; and
- ▶ the capacity of institutions of higher education to train educators to meet the needs of ELs.

Drawing on findings from the task force, the state should invest in efforts that result in districts, schools, and CSDE itself having the capacities to ensure that the state's requirements for quality EL programming are realized. Once an effective implementation design for scaling quality EL instruction is operating in the state, administrators at all levels of the system would ideally be able to:

- ▶ gather detailed information about the specific services, staffing levels, and resources being deployed to support ELs in quality instructional designs at different levels of the system;
- ▶ articulate on a routine basis what successful EL education requires in terms of programs, personnel, and funding;
- ▶ have and use data to provide a more nuanced and accurate picture of students' academic growth and achievement patterns; and
- ▶ align EL implementation strategies with educational goals and system designs at the school, district, and state levels.

²¹⁶ See, for example, Rhode Island's blueprint, strategic plan, and instructional framework on State of Rhode Island Department of Education, "[Multilingual Learners \(MLLs\) / English Learners \(ELs\)](#)," accessed July 15, 2025, and Minnesota's EL Task Force report, available from the Minnesota Department of Education, [English Learner \(EL\) Task Force: Challenges and Recommendations](#) (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Department of Education, 2025).

More effective and meaningful communication is needed with immigrant parents.

In addition to individuals with expertise in EL instruction and education policy more broadly, interviewees included those running community-based programs that aim to support immigrant-background children's academic success. These included groups focused on refugee resettlement, health and social services, parent organizing, and others offering critical services based on their close-to-the-ground understanding of community needs. Program services included youth programs, such as tutoring and community field trips; activities to help families develop skills in literacy or advocacy; and support for critical education transitions, such as enrollment support for pre-K or kindergarten or helping families understand high school credits and what courses are needed for graduation and postsecondary opportunities. These organizations generally were not able to serve all children and families seeking their support, and in some cases they had limited relationships with schools and the larger education system. More concerning, their operations typically depended on temporary sources of funding, such as grants or private donors, and they often relied heavily on volunteers to provide program services.

Themes emerging from these interviews included ongoing unmet needs among immigrant parents to overcome language and systems knowledge barriers in order to support engagement with their children's education, and difficulties schools and communities face in creating and scaling two-generation initiatives that assist parents in developing knowledge and strategies that can lift their child's and family's education and life trajectories. The latter finding is puzzling in light of the state's professed support for two-generation approaches and its significant investment in adult education programs that operate within school districts and that could be tapped for such purposes.

In addition to scaling parent-focused programs that address information and skills gaps to support the upward integration trajectories of both immigrant parents and their school-age children, efforts to expand opportunities for the state's immigrant parents to become meaningful partners and active collaborators in their children's education could take many forms and be undertaken at the community, school, district, and state levels. For example, to provide official structures to bring the experiences of immigrant parents into policy and program processes, states including Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island have created English Learner/Multilingual Learner advisory councils or committees that include parents and advise state education department leadership on issues related to the quality of their children's education. In addition, such parent advisory councils exist in innumerable school districts from coast to coast,²¹⁷ including model efforts in cities such as Denver, nearby Vermont school districts,²¹⁸ and cities such as Worcester and Boston in Massachusetts.

The promulgation of the state's Parent Bill of Rights was also seen as a welcome and important development by interviewees. It was created through legislation passed in 2023 and adopted by the State Board of Education in early 2024, which directed CSDE to publish a Parent Bill of Rights for English Learners/Multilingual Learners with the start of the 2024–25 school year. This document makes plain the major

217 State of California, "5 CCR § 11308. Advisory Committees," *California Code of Regulations* 2003, no. 2 (January 8, 2003); State of California, "5 CCR § 15495. Definitions," *California Code of Regulations* 2017, no. 11 (March 14, 2017); State of Illinois, "Section 228.30 Establishment of Programs," *Illinois Administrative Code* 46 (July 13, 2022): 13258; State of Massachusetts, "Section 6A: English Learner Parent Advisory Council," accessed April 23, 2025.

218 Essex Westford School District, "Multilingual Advisory Council (MAC)," accessed April 23, 2025.

policies in force across the state that are intended to ensure education access for immigrant-background students and ELs.²¹⁹ It affirms, among other things, parents' right to receive information about the ability of students to enroll in K-12 schools regardless of immigration status; for those with limited proficiency in English, to receive translation and interpretation services; the rights of EL students to access grade-level curriculum content; and ELs' right to bilingual instruction if it is provided in their school district. Implementation of this bill of rights is intended to widely communicate this important information to parents, and perhaps in doing so, to help ensure that schools in the state are aware of and comply with the various enumerated rights.

However, several of the key rights enumerated remain beyond reach in many districts, particularly access to bilingual instruction when conditions defined in state law warrant it and access for ELs to grade-level content. As described earlier in this section, delivering on these rights across the state will require improvements in technical support and other processes that build system capacities to provide effective instructional programs for ELs at

the school and classroom levels. Should the state fail to act proactively, local actors (both inside and outside schools) can of course still educate themselves on the capacities their schools and district may lack and advance efforts to improve access to effective program designs and quality instruction for EL students. Still, a statewide effort to make progress on established policy goals will be needed to bring promising practices to scale and to create more consistent quality programming for ELs across Connecticut.

A statewide effort to make progress on established policy goals will be needed to bring promising practices to scale and to create more consistent quality programming for ELs across Connecticut.

219 CSDE, "Parent Bill of Rights."

9 Early Childhood Education and Care

During early childhood, infants, toddlers, and preschool children undergo rapid physical, cognitive, emotional, and social growth. More than 1 million neural connections are formed each second during the first years of life, and more than 90 percent of the brain's architecture has developed before age 5, laying the groundwork for all future learning.²²⁰ Recognizing the critical nature of this period in a child's development, many states have in recent decades been working to scale up their provision of high-quality early childhood programs as a cost-effective means to close gaps and help children prepare to succeed in kindergarten and beyond, with positive effects continuing into adulthood.

For immigrant-background children (those with at least one immigrant parent) and Dual Language Learners (DLLs) also known as Multilingual Learners (young children with at least one parent who speaks a language other than English at home), the early childhood years are especially significant. These children often face unique challenges and opportunities that shape their developmental trajectories and future education success. Access to high-quality early childhood programs that account for their specific strengths and needs can therefore be critically important in supporting these children's early language development, school readiness, future academic success, and longer-term health and well-being.

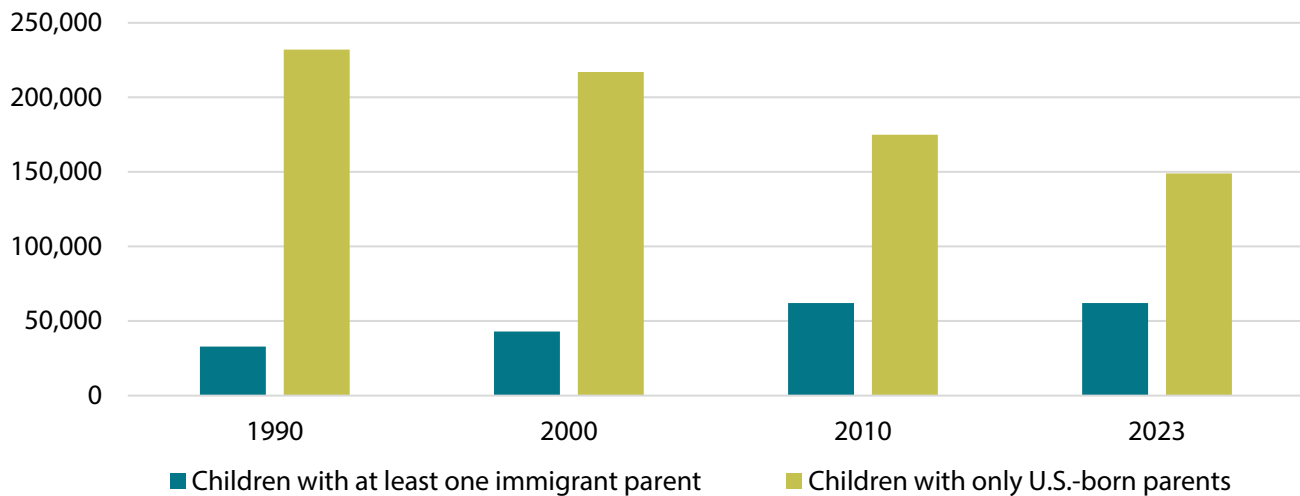
Access to high-quality early childhood programs that account for their specific strengths and needs can therefore be critically important in supporting these children's early language development, school readiness, future academic success, and longer-term health and well-being.

A. Characteristics of Connecticut's Young Child Population

In recent decades, the number of immigrant families with young children in Connecticut has increased significantly. In 1990, there were 33,000 children under age 6 who were part of immigrant families in the state, 91 percent of whom were born in the United States; they comprised 12 percent of the state's young child population at that time. By 2023, their share of Connecticut's young child population had grown to 29 percent, as the total number of young children from immigrant families living in the state almost doubled to 62,000, 90 percent of whom were born in the United States and thus have been U.S. citizens from birth (see Figure 2).

²²⁰ Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child, "Brain Architecture," accessed July 15, 2025.

FIGURE 2

Number of Connecticut Children Ages 0 to 5, by Parental Immigration Status, 1990–2023

Source: Migration Policy Institute (MPI) analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's 1990 and 2000 Decennial Census and the 2010 and 2023 American Community Survey (ACS).

Nationwide data show that immigrant households have more limited access to early childhood services in comparison to nonimmigrant households, despite making up a significant portion of populations that early childhood services aim to support.²²¹ Most early childhood programs and funding focus on supporting low-income households. For example, Head Start and Early Head Start determine income eligibility and prioritize enrollment for children from low-income families, using the U.S. Department of Health and

Nationwide data show that immigrant households have more limited access to early childhood services in comparison to nonimmigrant households, despite making up a significant portion of populations that early childhood services aim to support.

Human Services' Poverty Guidelines as part of their criteria.²²² Similarly, home visiting services prioritize mothers and infants in households with incomes below 100 percent of the federal poverty level.²²³ In Connecticut, there were approximately 70,000 foreign-born parents with children ages 0 to 5 as of 2019–23, 12 percent of whose households were below the federal poverty level, and approximately 203,000 U.S.-born parents with children in the same age group, of whom 7 percent were below the poverty line.²²⁴

An important additional consideration for prioritization of families for early childhood services is the educational attainment of parents, as research shows a correlation between this and a child's school

221 Maki Park, Jacob Hofstetter, and Ivana Tù Nhi Giang, *Overlooked but Essential: Language Access in Early Childhood Programs* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2022).

222 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, "Poverty Guidelines and Determining Eligibility for Participation in Head Start Programs," updated February 13, 2025.

223 Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, *Connecticut Home Visiting System: Policy and Procedure Manual* (Hartford: Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, 2025).

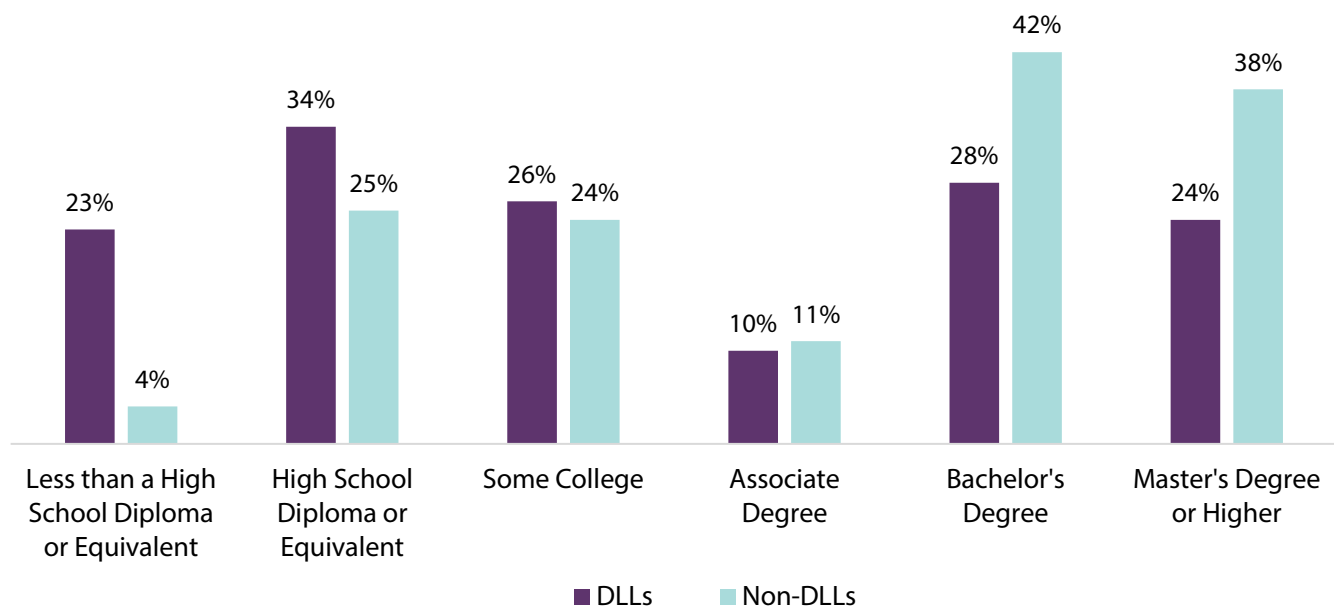
224 Migration Policy Institute (MPI) analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS), pooled for 2019–23.

readiness and future academic success.²²⁵ This correlation holds particular importance for Connecticut policymakers and early childhood system leaders: While the 77,000 DLLs in Connecticut as of 2019–23 comprised 37 percent of the state’s children ages 0 to 5, they were 75 percent of all children in this age group with a parent whose highest level of education was less than a high school diploma or equivalent (see Figure 3). This significant disproportionality underscores the heightened value early childhood program participation holds for children from these families, as well as the potential benefits of connecting their parents to programs and learning opportunities that can lift their own education and economic trajectories and those of their children.

FIGURE 3

Parental Education Levels of Connecticut Children Ages 0 to 5, by DLL Status, 2019–23

Share of children with at least one parent whose highest level of formal education is...



Note: Percentages add to more than 100 percent because children with two parents who have different levels of education are represented twice in the graph.

Source: MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data.

B. Early Childhood Services in Connecticut

The early childhood field is complex, encompassing services for different age groups (for example, infants, toddlers, and preschoolers) and services addressing various aspects of child development (including health, care, and early education). The public is often most familiar with early childhood education and care (ECEC) services, which largely serve 3- and 4-year-olds and seek to integrate preschool education and child care so

225 Robert Crosnoe, *Two-Generation Strategies and Involving Immigrant Parents in Children's Education* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2010); Thomas Gabe and Gene Falk, *Parents' Work and Family Economic Well-Being* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2006); U.S. General Accounting Office, *Early Childhood Programs: Parent Education and Income Best Predict Participation* (Washington, DC: U.S. General Accounting Office, 1994); Lynn A. Karoly and Gabriella C. Gonzalez, "Early Care and Education for Children in Immigrant Families," *The Future of Children* 21, no. 1 (2011): 71–101; National Research Council, *Hispanics and the Future of America* (Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2006); National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures* (Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2017).

that young children of working parents can be enrolled in up to a full-day program, if needed. The diversity of services required for children across the 0–5 or 0–8 age span, along with the need for coordination across different sectors, makes the field of early childhood multifaceted and challenging to navigate. Additionally, how early childhood services are structured and delivered varies from state to state. In Connecticut, early childhood services—including state-funded ECEC, financial assistance grants, home visiting services (family-focused support delivered in the home), Birth to Three system services (early intervention for infants and toddlers with developmental delays or disabilities), child care licensing, and early childhood workforce development—are collectively overseen by the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood.

Given this diversity of services and the limited scope of the study, this section focuses on several key services that play particularly critical roles in supporting children and families during the early years: ECEC, home visiting, and Birth to Three services. Challenges affecting the equitable provision of quality early childhood services to the state’s immigrant-background and DLL children, as well as opportunities to address those challenges, were identified through interviews with individuals working in state systems and community programs as well as through analysis of program policies and service provision data.

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC services in Connecticut—as across the country—are provided through a mixed delivery system consisting of public, private, nonprofit, and for-profit organizations and include center-based programs, home-based care, family child care, and preschool programs. Programs have a wide range of costs, care arrangements, and educational approaches, all of which affect the availability and quality of services provided to families.

Supporting DLLs’ Language Development

Several decades of research show that quality ECEC services have the power to transform the lives of children, providing a strong foundation for lifelong learning, and to offer additional economic benefits by enabling parents of young children to participate in the workforce.²²⁶ Early childhood scholars, leaders, and practitioners widely agree that comprehensive, developmentally appropriate ECEC programs must support all domains of early learning and development—cognitive, socioemotional, physical, and linguistic. They also agree that language development is a primary driver, if not the key driver, of young children’s cognitive development and, as a result, brain architecture. Research shows that early language experiences stimulate neural connections, particularly in the brain’s language and cognitive centers, during a critical period of rapid synapse formation. These connections form the foundation upon which more complex learning and skills are built.²²⁷

With DLLs comprising 37 percent of Connecticut’s young children ages 0–5,²²⁸ the capacities of its ECEC and other early childhood services to effectively and equitably serve these children are central concerns.

226 Greg J. Duncan and Katherine Magnuson, “Investing in Preschool Programs,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 27, no. 2 (2013): 109–132; Antje von Suchodoletz et al., “Early Childhood Education and Care Quality and Associations with Child Outcomes: A Meta-Analysis,” *PLOS One* 18, no. 10 (2023): e0293056; Executive Office of the U.S. President, *The Economics of Early Childhood Investments* (Washington, DC: Executive Office of the U.S. President, 2014).

227 Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child, “Brain Architecture.”

228 MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data.

When these young DLLs enroll in English-speaking preschool, kindergarten, or other early childhood programs, their brains are using multiple language systems that are developing at different rates.²²⁹

Research shows that to effectively support their early learning trajectories, program designs must be responsive to their particular cognitive, socioemotional, and language development needs.²³⁰ In fact, DLLs benefit disproportionately

from participating in quality ECEC compared to non-DLLs, but only when the programs they participate in are of high quality and take their linguistic needs into consideration.²³¹

Research shows that to effectively support their early learning trajectories, program designs must be responsive to their particular cognitive, socioemotional, and language development needs.

Rooted in such research, language development, as a foundation for all learning, is emphasized in Connecticut's Early Learning and Development Standards (CT ELDS) DLL framework. The framework highlights the importance of considering a child's language development in all languages they are learning when tracking progress in other developmental areas.²³² The framework also acknowledges the proven advantages of learning multiple languages and promotes continuing support for children's home language development. While the CT ELDS DLL framework sets important expectations for language-responsive practices, its influence on program implementation depends largely on the extent to which programs receive guidance, oversight, and training aligned with its principles. To this end, the Office of Early Childhood has provided some professional development opportunities and resources, though there is not yet a consistent, statewide system ensuring that all providers are prepared to implement the framework's recommendations effectively.

In addition to supporting home language development during program hours, fostering positive communication with families is an essential aspect of supporting home language development overall. Immigrant families, particularly recent arrivals, recognize the power of English in the United States, and this may lead parents to question whether they should stop speaking their home language to avoid potentially delaying their child's English language development.²³³ Building positive relationships with parents of DLLs and providing them with encouragement and strategies to continue boosting their child's home language skills is important not only for supporting children's growing language skills and associated cognitive development, but also their cultural identity and self-esteem.²³⁴

229 Carol Scheffner Hammer et al., "The Language and Literacy Development of Young Dual Language Learners: A Critical Review," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (2014): 715–33.

230 Linda M. Espinosa, *Early Education for Dual Language Learners: Promoting School Readiness and Early School Success* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2013).

231 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, *Systems Framework to Support Dual Language Learning in Early Care and Education Settings* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2024).

232 Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, *Supporting All Children Using the Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards: Dual Language Learners* (Hartford: Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, 2020); Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, *Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards: What Children, Birth to Five, Should Know and Be Able to Do* (Hartford: Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, 2014).

233 Rica Ramírez, "To Speak or Not to Speak My Language: Supporting Families' Home Language Practices," *Teaching Young Children* 17, no. 1 (2023).

234 BUILD Initiative, *Supporting Multilingual Learners* (Boston: BUILD Initiative, 2023).

Because DLLs benefit most from ECEC programming tailored to their distinct brain development and learning needs, identifying a child's linguistic background is a critical first step in supporting their language development in all languages they are learning. Numerous states, including Connecticut, utilize home language surveys to identify English Learners in K-12 schools and 4-year-olds enrolled in public preschool programs.²³⁵ While home language surveys and other methods and tools, such as teacher observations or family interviews, can be used across all ECEC programs to identify and support DLLs, Connecticut's official home language survey protocols are limited to public school enrollment and associated preschool settings. ECEC programs outside of public school enrollment are not required to administer a standardized home language survey, meaning DLLs are not systemically identified in those settings. Without consistent DLL identification across all settings, system capacities for delivering tailored instructional strategies, home language support, and culturally responsive curriculum are compromised.

In addition, accurately identifying a child's home language and their status as a DLL is essential to avoid misinterpreting the dual language acquisition process as a learning disability, which can lead to the over-identification of DLLs for early childhood special education. Given the many different forms ECEC can take, having a standardized approach would help ensure that all DLLs, regardless of the program in which they are enrolled, receive access to appropriate language development support.

Access to ECEC Programs in Connecticut

Connecticut's ECEC system offers a range of programs and financial support for families. These include the Smart Start grant program, which funds the establishment or expansion of preschool programs in public schools; Early Start CT, which is a point-of-service contract between the Office of Early Childhood and contracted local child care programs or municipalities; and Care 4 Kids, a child care subsidy program for qualifying low to moderate income families to use at participating programs. A child or family's immigration status is not a factor in determining their eligibility to receive state financial support for ECEC or to enroll in ECEC programs generally. This is true for the state's newly developed Early Start CT, which combines preexisting programs including School Readiness Grants, State Head Start Supplement Grants, and Child Day Care Contracts into one new program that is fully funded by the state and does not mix with federal dollars.²³⁶ In contrast, the Care 4 Kids subsidy program is provided through a mix of federal and state funding and has different application requirements; this program has lower utilization among immigrant-background families, as the enrollment process requires detailed income verification and many immigrant parents, wary of the potential repercussions of providing such information to a government entity, have opted out of the program.²³⁷

More broadly, despite the many program options that exist, ECEC services are not available for many children, especially those from low-income families or facing systemic barriers such as residing in underfunded regions. For example, more than 45,000 Connecticut children are eligible for but not being served by formal child care services, and this gap is particularly pronounced in towns with higher

²³⁵ U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, "Tools and Resources for Identifying All English Learners," in *English Learner Tool Kit* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

²³⁶ Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, "Early Start CT," accessed August 6, 2025.

²³⁷ Daron Cyr et al., *State of Early Childhood: Equity of Access for Immigrant and Refugee Families* (New Haven: Connecticut Voices for Children, 2022).

Immigrant-dense cities such as Danbury, Norwalk, and Stamford are considered child care deserts, defined as places where there is at most only one licensed program slot available for every three children.

proportions of immigrant families.²³⁸ Immigrant-dense cities such as Danbury, Norwalk, and Stamford are considered child care deserts, defined as places where there is at most only one licensed program slot available for every three children.²³⁹ This means that many families meeting poverty or other eligibility criteria are still unable to access ECEC due to limited program capacity, funding constraints,

or logistical barriers. These structural limitations highlight the need for more coordinated and adequately resourced efforts to meet the early learning and care needs of all young children in the state, with particular attention to those disproportionately excluded from current systems of support.

The ECEC Workforce

Connecticut's ECEC programs are grappling with a shortage of early childhood educators, with low wages, long hours, and limited benefits (such as limited access to health insurance²⁴⁰) making it difficult to attract and retain qualified staff.²⁴¹ Additional challenges arise when programs aim to hire and retain culturally and linguistically diverse staff, despite their importance in serving immigrant families. These include English language proficiency requirements that can disqualify otherwise capable and experienced educators, unclear procedures around recognizing educational or professional qualifications earned in another country, a lack of bilingual reviewers for Child Development Associate certification, and lower compensation for assistant-level staff, who are often the most diverse group of ECEC practitioners.²⁴² Many programs in Connecticut face difficulties in hiring and retaining bilingual staff, especially those proficient in languages other than Spanish.²⁴³ The shortage of bilingual educators not only affects direct communication with families but also the cultural competence of services provided. The lack of such staff can lead to misunderstandings, reduced engagement, and potentially less effective services for immigrant and non-English-speaking families.

Informal family, friend, and neighbor care providers and licensed family child care providers are often the preferred choice among immigrant parents because they frequently share the language and cultural background of the families they serve, fostering trust and easier communication. In addition, these providers are often embedded within the same neighborhoods and communities as the families of children in their care and have more flexible hours than other ECEC services, making this a flexible and

238 Carla B. Abdo-Katsipis and Lauren K. Ruth, *State of Early Childhood: A Response to the Governor's Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care and a Continuation of Spotlighting Disenfranchised Populations* (New Haven: Connecticut Voices for Children, 2024).

239 Center for American Progress, "U.S. Child Care Deserts," accessed May 22, 2025.

240 For example, in 2023, 34.9 percent of child care workers in Connecticut relied on Medicaid coverage. See Georgetown University, McCourt School of Public Policy, Center for Children and Families; National Association for the Education of Young Children; and Center for Law and Social Policy, "Medicaid Is a Critical Support for the Early Childhood Education Workforce," updated April 2025.

241 Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, "Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care," accessed May 22, 2025; Abdo-Katsipis and Ruth, *State of Early Childhood*.

242 Cyr et al., *State of Early Childhood*; Alexis Fintland, Margie McHugh, and Maki Park, *Understanding Obstacles to Foreign Qualification Recognition for Key U.S. Early Childhood Education and Care Positions* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2024).

243 Cyr et al., *State of Early Childhood*.

accessible form of care.²⁴⁴ However, despite their important role, the number of family child care providers in Connecticut has been decreasing, limiting this essential resource for immigrant and other families.²⁴⁵

Several reasons have been cited for the decrease in licensed family child care providers, some of which may particularly affect immigrant providers. These include regulatory complexities, such as the need to comply with state regulations, zoning laws, and licensing requirements, which can be particularly challenging for those unfamiliar with U.S. systems. Financial constraints also play a role, such as a lack of capital to invest in upgrades or renovations necessary to meet licensing standards, or an inability to secure loans due to one's immigration status or lack of a U.S. credit history. Finally, because many of these providers care for children in their own homes, the nature of their housing can also be a limitation; many immigrant families rent their homes, and landlords may prohibit operating a business on the property.²⁴⁶

ECEC Goals and State Investment

In 2023, Connecticut initiated the Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care, a five-year strategic plan established by Governor Ned Lamont, with the goal of developing an equitable, high-quality, and sustainable ECEC system in the state.²⁴⁷ The strategic plan focuses on actionable, data-driven solutions that prioritize equitable access to early care and education, support for families and providers, and overall economic growth for Connecticut. A report by the panel that was submitted to the governor's office in 2023 included extensive feedback from workgroups, national and local experts, and stakeholders including providers, parents, businesses, and advocates. The panel's recommendations aim to address a variety of challenges in Connecticut's ECEC system, such as access, affordability, and quality to enhance family-friendliness, attract and retain more families, and ensure every child has a quality educational foundation to prepare them for future success.²⁴⁸ The report also emphasizes the importance of equitable access to ECEC for immigrant and refugee children, and outlines strategies to create a high-quality, sustainable, and inclusive child care system that addresses the diverse needs of state residents.

The Blue Ribbon Panel's report outlined a five-year plan to strengthen Connecticut's ECEC system, calling for a proposed state investment of \$148 million in fiscal year (FY) 2025, the plan's first year. While not fully funding the proposed increase, the Connecticut General Assembly did provide an additional \$45 million in funding in the FY 2025 budget, of which \$20 million came from one-time, federal funds through the *American Rescue Plan Act*.²⁴⁹ Because a significant portion of this funding was temporary, it was primarily aimed at stabilizing the child care sector in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, rather than establishing permanent increases to provider compensation or expanding their capacity to enroll more children.

In its FY 2026 appropriations, the state took a significant step toward long-term investment in the sector by establishing a \$300 million Early Childhood Education Endowment, using surplus funds from the FY 2025

244 Maki Park and Jazmin Flores Peña, *The Invisible Work of Family, Friend, and Neighbor Caregivers and Its Importance for Immigrant and Dual Language Learner Families* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2021).

245 Abdo-Katsipis and Ruth, *State of Early Childhood*.

246 Cyr et al., *State of Early Childhood*; Park and Flores Peña, *The Invisible Work of Family, Friend, and Neighbor Caregivers*.

247 Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, "Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care."

248 Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, "Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care."

249 Office of the Governor, "Governor Lamont Asks Legislature to Approve Funding Increase for Early Childhood Education" (press release, February 2024).

budget. The endowment was fully invested in a long-term, diversified portfolio and is designed to function outside the annual state budget process, with capped annual drawdowns to ensure sustainability.²⁵⁰ By establishing a dedicated, investment-based fund outside of the annual budget process, the endowment offers a stable and sustainable means of advancing Connecticut's ECEC system.

Home Visiting and Birth to Three Services

Home visiting and Birth to Three are two important early childhood programs that often work in tandem to serve young children and their families. Home visiting is a family-focused social service that involves trained professionals visiting families in their homes on a regular basis to provide guidance, resources, and education to expectant parents and parents with young children who are at risk for poor maternal and child health outcomes. Immigrant families can benefit greatly from home visiting services that offer help navigating early childhood, health, and social service systems; support home language development; and provide access to trauma-informed care.²⁵¹ However, immigrant families across the country are enrolled in home visiting programs less frequently than other families, and challenges low-income immigrant families often face are not typically used at the national level nor in Connecticut as indicators of service need. For example, indicators of vulnerability for young children, including living in a linguistically isolated household or having parents with limited English proficiency, are not treated as indicators that children should be prioritized for home visiting services—neither on their own nor in combination with other factors, such as low household income or low parental formal education.²⁵²

Connecticut currently uses five home visiting models: Parents as Teachers, Child First, Nurse-Family Partnership, Healthy Families America, and Early Head Start Home-Based Option.²⁵³ The state's priority populations for services include families with incomes below the federal poverty level, parents with low educational attainment (less than a high school diploma), and parents under 20 years of age. Since immigrant parents comprise 36 percent of all Connecticut parents with young children living below 100 percent of the federal poverty level, and 63 percent of young children's parents (age 25 or older) who have less than a high school diploma or equivalent, they are significant shares of two of these top target populations for home visiting.²⁵⁴ Existing state data do not make it possible, however, to tell whether immigrant families are being served proportionate to their representation within these priority groups.

Birth to Three services are part of the federal *Individuals with Disabilities Act* (IDEA) Part C, which focuses on early interventions.²⁵⁵ Within Connecticut, they are provided through community-based programs overseen and managed by the state's Office of Early Childhood. Children are eligible for Birth to Three services in Connecticut if they have significant developmental delays or a diagnosed medical condition that is likely to result in a developmental delay.²⁵⁶ Like home visiting, Birth to Three services are typically delivered in

250 Office of the State Treasurer, "Treasurer Russell Announces Investment of \$300 Million in Newly Created Early Childhood Education Endowment" (news release, July 1, 2025).

251 Maki Park and Caitlin Katsiaficas, *Leveraging the Potential of Home Visiting Programs to Serve Immigrant and Dual Language Learner Families* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2019).

252 Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, *Connecticut Home Visiting System: Policy and Procedure Manual*.

253 Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, "Home Visiting," accessed August 4, 2025.

254 MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data.

255 U.S. Department of Education, "Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Part 303 (Part C) - Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities," updated July 26, 2022.

256 Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, "Connecticut Birth to Three," accessed May 22, 2025.

the child's natural environment, often in the home. Birth to Three services are instrumental to identifying and addressing developmental delays in young children, including DLLs and children of immigrants, and to ensuring they receive early interventions to support their healthy development.

Both Birth to Three and home visiting services have the potential to create inclusive and supportive programming for immigrant families. By integrating strategies to address the unique needs of DLL and immigrant-background children within their frameworks, these programs can further enhance their accessibility and effectiveness. However, as the remainder of this subsection will discuss, there are barriers that have kept these programs from reaching their full potential, and more targeted support is needed to provide culturally and linguistically competent services to immigrant families in the state.

Both Birth to Three and home visiting services have the potential to create inclusive and supportive programming for immigrant families.

Equitable Access

To access home visiting and Birth to Three systems, most families are referred by their primary health-care provider. Therefore, having reliable health care is essential for connecting families with these services. Young DLLs (those ages 0–5) in Connecticut were twice as likely as non-DLLs to lack health insurance in the 2019–23 period, and a much smaller share of young DLLs had access to private health insurance than non-DLLs (48 percent versus 72 percent).²⁵⁷ While Connecticut's Medicaid program, the HUSKY Health program, uses state funding to extend coverage to a wider range of low-income noncitizens than are covered with federal funding,²⁵⁸ immigrant families who qualify may still face challenges to navigating enrollment processes due to language barriers and a lack of accessible information about available services.²⁵⁹

To address these concerns and expand enrollment beyond primary care physicians, Birth to Three services leverage “child find,” a component of IDEA Part C that requires statewide systems for identifying all children with disabilities. Connecticut's Birth to Three program has a dedicated staff member who conducts community outreach, with the goal of dispelling misconceptions and informing families of support available to them, regardless of immigration status. The program also partners with the Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center, which has bilingual staff and helps families navigate the system and understand their rights. In contrast, home visiting does not have a comparable outreach strategy for any population, as programs are already operating at full capacity and are unable to serve all eligible families. According to a 2023 estimate from the National Home Visiting Resource Center, 168,400 families in Connecticut could benefit from home visiting, 44 percent of which met one or more priority criteria. Of those, 3,931 were served, 26 percent of which spoke a language other than English as their primary language.²⁶⁰ This gap of more than 164,000

²⁵⁷ MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data.

²⁵⁸ Federal eligibility rules cover low-income lawful permanent residents (LPRs, also called green-card holders) with at least five years in that status, plus certain other groups. In Connecticut, green-card holders who are children or pregnant are covered even if they have fewer than five years in that status. State-funded HUSKY was extended in 2024 to also cover children age 15 and under who are part of income-qualifying families and whose immigration status makes them ineligible for federally funded coverage. See Section 5 of this report for more details.

²⁵⁹ Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, “Office of Early Childhood 2023 Legislative Session Public Act Summary Concerning Early Childhood” (summary of legislation, July 2023).

²⁶⁰ National Home Visiting Resource Center, “2024 Yearbook—State and Indigenous Profiles: Connecticut,” accessed May 22, 2025.

families underscores the urgent need to expand access to home visiting. And given the overlap between immigrant families and Connecticut's defined priority populations, future growth and expansion would ideally include intentional investment in multilingual staff and community-informed outreach strategies to reach eligible limited English proficient (LEP) parents.

Home visiting and Birth to Three services in rural areas, particularly the northwest corner of the state, face significant challenges due to the existence of fewer programs and practitioners in these areas. This has reportedly led to longer wait times for services, with some areas pushing the 40-day mark for early interventions, compared to the 30-day average in more populated regions.²⁶¹ Transportation issues exacerbate these inequities, as practitioners in rural areas must travel longer distances between homes, reducing the number of families they can serve. Birth to Three early intervention services have made efforts to improve accessibility through remote services, allowing bilingual practitioners to connect with immigrant families in different parts of the state. However, remote services should be supplemental to in-person services, not the default method of working with families.

The Home Visiting and Birth to Three Workforce

While home visiting and Birth to Three programs strive to provide language access through translators and interpreters, according to interviewees, both fields are facing substantial challenges in recruiting and retaining practitioners of diverse backgrounds who can directly communicate with families in their native languages.²⁶² For Birth to Three, hiring challenges persist in part due to the demanding nature of the profession, which requires specialized training, emotional labor, and frequent travel to families' homes. These demands, combined with limited workforce pipelines and few incentives to attract bilingual or multicultural professionals, make it difficult to recruit and retain staff who reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity of the families served. Although the program has been exploring partnerships with higher education institutions and seeking to develop associate-level pathways to increase workforce diversity, progress has been slow.

Home visiting services face similar challenges. While efforts are being made to provide bilingual services, demand often outstrips the supply of qualified bilingual practitioners. According to a study conducted by the University of Connecticut in 2020, 15 percent of home visitors spoke Spanish, compared to the 22 percent of families served that year.²⁶³ These challenges are concerning, given the need to expand services to other eligible yet underrepresented populations, including speakers of languages other than Spanish. And with programs already struggling to meet current needs, expansions to reach these underserved groups will require deliberate investment in workforce development strategies that prioritize linguistic and cultural competence skills.

Resources

Birth to Three, while federally mandated under IDEA Part C, relies heavily on state funding to operate. For fiscal years 2023–24 and 2024–25, Birth to Three services in Connecticut were allotted \$32.45 million, \$5

²⁶¹ Author interview with Connecticut Office of Early Childhood staff, September 5, 2024.

²⁶² Author interview with Connecticut Office of Early Childhood staff, September 5, 2024.

²⁶³ University of Connecticut, School of Social Work, Research Unit, *Home Visiting in Connecticut: Current Status, Future Directions* (Hartford: University of Connecticut, 2020).

million of which comes from the federal government annually.²⁶⁴ This is an increase of \$8.5 million, including \$2 million specifically designated for Spanish interpreter services for meetings with families.²⁶⁵ With approximately 85 percent of the program’s budget provided by state funding, the state’s continued financial support is clearly essential to sustaining and expanding these vital services.

Home visiting programs in Connecticut face ongoing funding challenges and uncertainties. The state allocates approximately \$22 million total for home visiting programs, with about \$10 million coming directly from federal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting funds and the remaining \$12 million from state funds.²⁶⁶ However, as noted earlier, this level of funding is sufficient to serve only a small fraction of families whose characteristics make them key targets for program services.

Home visiting programs in Connecticut face ongoing funding challenges and uncertainties.

C. *Recommendations for Strengthening Early Childhood Services*

Connecticut has recently taken important legislative steps to improve resources for young children through the creation of the Early Childhood Education Endowment, the development of Early Start CT, and the expansion of the Care 4 Kids subsidy program. These actions complement other strategic efforts to strengthen early childhood services, including the creation of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care, expansion of HUSKY Health, and continued investments in Birth to Three and home visiting programs. These steps provide a strong foundation for improved service access, affordability, and quality for all Connecticut families with young children. However, ensuring the state’s efforts result in programs that are effective in reaching and serving its immigrant-background and DLL children—meaning they are able to address these children’s particular cognitive, socioemotional, and language development needs—requires intentional strategies to design and deliver such programs at scale. The following recommendations outline ways to strengthen existing early childhood system capacities and more effectively support these children’s kindergarten readiness and future education and career success.

Improving DLL Program Quality

Efforts to provide effective early childhood programming for the state’s DLL children appear to rest on a weak foundation—one that lacks an intentional design of interlocking policies, instructional approaches, and supports for implementing and sustaining quality programming at a scale commensurate with system-

²⁶⁴ State of Connecticut, *An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2025, and Making Appropriations Therefor, and Provisions Related to Revenue and Other Items Implementing the State Budget*, H.B. No. 6941, 2023 Legislative Session (June 5, 2023); Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, “Annual Part C Application,” accessed May 22, 2025.

²⁶⁵ Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, “P.A. 23-204 (H.B. 6941) – An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2025, and Making Appropriations Therefor, and Provisions Related to Revenue and Other Items Implementing the State Budget—Summary of Provisions Concerning Early Childhood” (budget summary for FY 2024–25, July 2023).

²⁶⁶ Connecticut General Assembly, “Connecticut Home Visiting System Summary” (data tables, February 13, 2025).

wide needs. The following actions can broadly help build capacity, engage families, and embed linguistically responsive practices across the state's early childhood programs:

- ▶ **Include 4-year-old children under the state's current K-12 requirements for provision of bilingual education programs.** Connecticut law mandates that whenever there are 20 or more students in a public school who share a dominant non-English language and who are not sufficiently proficient in English, that school district must provide them with bilingual education. The law currently focuses on providing bilingual education to students in kindergarten through grade 12, meaning preschool is not explicitly included under the law. Including preschool programs run by public schools under the law would provide a vehicle for scaling effective program designs for DLLs through an established system already familiar with these requirements, while also promoting better alignment of instructional designs across the preschool and elementary school years.
- ▶ **Leverage Early Start CT to support consistent DLL identification across ECEC programs.** Connecticut's newly developed Early Start CT program presents an opportunity to implement a standardized and coordinated approach to identifying DLLs across multiple ECEC programs. This approach could leverage tools such as the home language survey already in use in K-12 settings to identify children's home languages at enrollment. Building a unified identification system through Early Start CT could help ensure that DLLs consistently have access to key supports such as bilingual educators, translated materials for families, and culturally responsive instructional practices that promote both English and home language development.
- ▶ **Invest in educator and administrator skills for delivering effective DLL instruction.** Expanding professional development supports for educators on dual language development and culturally responsive practices, and for administrators on developing and sustaining effective instructional programs, is critical. Several states have sought to tackle these needs, including California and Illinois, both of which have developed extensive professional development systems focused on culturally and linguistically responsive approaches.²⁶⁷ Washington State has also made significant strides by investing in multilingual early learning resources and coaching for educators, supporting them in meeting the diverse needs of learners from different backgrounds.²⁶⁸
- ▶ **Create systemic approaches for engaging and partnering with families.** Building strong connections with parents that affirm the value of home languages and cultures is essential to becoming partners with them in promoting their children's ongoing language development and early school success. However, as underscored in this report, several of the state's early childhood programs are manifestly unable to meet service demands and nearly all programs lack a workforce able to engage effectively with LEP parents and to share information with them at a level commensurate to that received by non-LEP other parents. Given these realities, actors inside and outside government should consider launching a sustained multilingual campaign, in partnership with trusted community-based organizations, to reach immigrant-background parents of young children with clear, accessible information about their children's early development and value of rich home language use to their

²⁶⁷ California Department of Education, "[Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching](#)," updated June 5, 2025; Illinois State Board of Education, "[Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards](#)," accessed May 22, 2025.

²⁶⁸ Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families, "[Professional Development and Training](#)," accessed May 22, 2025.

children’s brain development. Connecticut could build on strategies used in states such as Oregon, where regional Early Learning Hubs coordinate bilingual outreach and culturally responsive family engagement efforts.²⁶⁹ And with new platforms and technologies emerging that engage parents seeking to learn about and reinforce their young children’s developmental trajectories, directly arming the state’s immigrant-background parents with this information, in languages they most commonly speak, may help to redress some of the limits in current program capacities to effectively serve these families and their children.

Improving Early Childhood Education and Care

1. *Expand programs in underserved areas*

- ▶ **Following the recommendation provided in the Blue Ribbon Panel report, address child care deserts with increased funding that targets underserved communities.** Funding the establishment of more ECEC providers in underserved communities will promote equity not only for immigrant families but for all families struggling to access needed ECEC services. Priority should be given to establishing or expanding programs in child care deserts—especially rural and low-income areas—and to creating new programs in these regions, which often have high concentrations of immigrant families. In addition to these service expansions, it is important that sufficient funding is made available to ensure the quality of services remains consistent. By doing so, Connecticut can provide opportunities for every child, regardless of their background or location.

2. *Increase diversity among ECEC program staff*

Supporting the development of a workforce with skills responsive to the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of Connecticut’s DLL and immigrant-background children is essential to meeting these children’s needs and being able to communicate and engage with their families.

- ▶ **Streamline pathways for recognizing and certifying foreign education credentials.** This would remove barriers facing qualified immigrant educators seeking to enter the field, helping to both address staffing shortages and make the ECEC workforce more reflective of the cultural and linguistic diversity in Connecticut’s young child population.
- ▶ **Expand scholarships and tuition assistance for bilingual students pursuing careers in early childhood services.** Such measures would further strengthen the ECEC workforce by supporting individuals with essential skills for working with multilingual children and their families.
- ▶ **Incorporate language proficiency into compensation structures.** Recognizing the additional value bilingual educators bring to ECEC programs by offering wage differentials, stipends, or bonuses for using their language skills in instruction or family engagement could support their recruitment and retention.

²⁶⁹ Oregon Department of Early Learning and Care, “Early Learning Hubs,” accessed May 22, 2025.

3. Strengthen support for family child care providers

Family child care providers play a vital role in serving immigrant families, and targeted support could help them thrive and increase the availability of culturally and linguistically aligned care for DLLs and immigrant-background children. Strategies for doing so include:

- ▶ **Sustain and expand financial support through grants and subsidies to help family child care providers cover licensing, training, and facility improvement costs.** Connecticut has made notable investments through the Child Care Facilities Construction and Renovation Grant Program, which is administered by the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, overseen by the Office of Early Childhood, and provides capital grants to help family child care providers improve health, safety, and quality.²⁷⁰ Additionally, the statewide Staffed Family Child Care Networks (SFCCNs), coordinated by United Way's 211 Child Care hub and regional partners, offer coaching, business assistance, and peer support to enhance provider sustainability and quality.²⁷¹ To build on this progress, expanding and stabilizing funding for both programs is critical. This would include transitioning the facilities grant program from temporary *American Rescue Plan Act* funding to permanent state support and renewing and increasing funding for SFCCNs to sustain and grow their services. Potentially leveraging the Early Childhood Education Endowment as a long-term financing source could ensure these efforts are integrated and sustainable, and strengthen family child care capacity statewide.
- ▶ **Reduce bureaucratic barriers, which can disproportionately affect immigrant providers.** This has been done in other states, such as California, where SB 234 prohibits localities from requiring zoning permits or business licenses for family child care homes, thereby simplifying the regulatory landscape.²⁷² Oregon has also undertaken efforts to revise zoning and licensing rules to better accommodate in-home child care provided within a residential structure.²⁷³
- ▶ **Expand initiatives such as the Early Childhood Business Incubator Program.**²⁷⁴ This could involve offering mentorship, shared facilities, and business development support for family child care providers, especially in underserved areas.

Improving Home Visiting and Birth to Three Services

1. Expand home visiting services for immigrant and DLL families

Home visiting programs offer critical support to many families in Connecticut, including immigrant and DLL families. However, they currently are unable to reach many eligible families that could benefit from this service. To address this, the state could:

- ▶ **Take steps to address program capacity issues and expand services.** Increasing investment and other resources will be necessary if programs are to reach eligible families, immigrant and U.S.

²⁷⁰ Local Initiatives Support Corporation, Connecticut, "Child Care & Early Learning Facilities," accessed August 6, 2025.

²⁷¹ Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, "Staffed Family Child Care Networks (SFCCN)," updated December 20, 2024.

²⁷² State of Oregon, "Application of Land Use Regulations to Family Child Care Home," *Oregon Revised Statutes* Vol. 9, Title 30, Section 329A.440, accessed July 15, 2025.

²⁷³ State of California, *An Act to Amend ... the Health and Safety Code, Relating to Family Daycare home*, SB 234, 2019 Legislative Session (September 5, 2019).

²⁷⁴ Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, "Learn About Family Child Care Home Incubators," updated August 19, 2025.

born alike. At the same time, strengthening partnerships with community organizations that serve immigrant populations would be a valuable strategy for creating effective referral points for eligible immigrant families.

- ▶ **Consider updating the priority population criteria for home visiting programs to include LEP and/or linguistically isolated families who meet one or more other priority population criteria.** A significant share of LEP families in Connecticut fall within one or more priority population for home visiting, such as living below the federal poverty level or having parents with less than a high school diploma or equivalent. While LEP status or household linguistic isolation may not warrant priority designation on its own, finding ways of acknowledging these alongside other qualifying factors could help keep these families from being overlooked.

2. Strengthen Birth to Three services for DLL and immigrant children

Early identification and intervention through Birth to Three programs are vital for young children with developmental delays or disabilities, including immigrant-background and DLL children. In order to be most effective, early intervention services should be timely and culturally and linguistically responsive.

- ▶ **Improve equitable access through flexible service delivery and expand language supports.** Combining in-person and remote service options can help reduce delays and long waitlists, particularly in rural areas where provider shortages are most severe. Additionally, expanding language access in evaluations and services to cover top languages beyond Spanish would help better serve Connecticut's diverse communities. After Spanish, the top four non-English languages spoken in DLLs' households in Connecticut are Portuguese, Polish, Chinese, and Haitian Creole;²⁷⁵ support in such languages could make early childhood services more accessible to children from these linguistic communities.

3. Expand efforts to create a representative and sustainable workforce for home visiting and Birth to Three programs

A diverse, well-supported workforce is essential for delivering effective services that meet the linguistic and cultural needs of immigrant families. Sustained investment in workforce development is critical to meeting growing demand and addressing persistent equity gaps.

- ▶ **Build targeted pipelines and improve support for bilingual early childhood professionals.** Establishing partnerships with higher education institutions, community colleges, and immigrant communities can help recruit and prepare a more linguistically and culturally responsive workforce. Providing tuition assistance, foreign qualification recognition support, and clear professional pathways, paired with increased compensation, bilingual stipends, and career advancement opportunities could aid in both attracting and retaining skilled professionals who reflect the families they serve.

²⁷⁵ MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data.

10 Concluding Thoughts and Potential State-Level Coordination and Planning Opportunities

Taking stock of the snapshots of issues, challenges, and opportunities presented in this report, it is natural to consider whether there are benefits to establishing processes or structures to understand and address them in a coordinated way—particularly those that intersect with multiple policy and program areas.

Such efforts could more broadly build the state’s capacities to analyze and address immigration and integration impacts on Connecticut’s economy, service systems, and local communities, and facilitate more effective responses to issues that cut across state agencies or levels of government.

In fact, many states have taken steps to study issues affecting their immigrant families, coordinate efficient responses to particular needs, and/or create standing capacity within their governments to build expertise and lead responses as needed.

Actions such as these can serve as models Connecticut could consider adopting to equip its leaders with the knowledge and means to better manage responses to integration and immigration policy needs and opportunities. Notable examples include:

Actions such as these can serve as models Connecticut could consider adopting to equip its leaders with the knowledge and means to better manage responses to integration and immigration policy needs and opportunities.

- ▶ **Creation of a state Office of New Americans (ONA).** Such offices exist in more than 15 states. Their placement within state bureaucracies varies, with some located within governors’ offices and others in state economic development, social services, health, or other agencies, often with a dotted-line report to the governor. Their roles typically include coordinating state agency responses to integration and immigration policy issues and advising the governor and agency executives on newcomer community and state agency concerns. Maine is the most recent state to create an ONA; launched in early 2025, it is situated within the Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation and the Future. Its priorities focus on workforce pathways and entrepreneurship support for immigrants, improving coordination among organizations supporting immigrants, and expanding and strengthening English language acquisition opportunities.²⁷⁶ The creation of Maine’s ONA was a key element in the state’s ten-year Economic Development Strategy,²⁷⁷ which was created using an intensive public engagement process with the goal of charting a course for addressing long-term workforce and economic development needs.
- ▶ **Formulation of a New Americans Agenda.** Created by the state legislature in 1992, the Massachusetts Office for Refugees and Immigrants is one of the older state offices focused on newcomer concerns. In 2008, recognizing the importance of immigrant families to the state’s future growth and prosperity, Governor Deval Patrick issued an executive order seeking to better address

²⁷⁶ Maine Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation and the Future, “[Maine Office of New Americans](#),” accessed May 20, 2025.

²⁷⁷ Maine Department of Economic and Community Development, “[Maine’s Economic Development Strategy](#),” accessed May 20, 2025.

integration needs.²⁷⁸ He empaneled the Governor’s Advisory Council for Refugees and Immigrants, directing it to work with the Massachusetts Office for Refugees and Immigrants and the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition to oversee a unique statewide research and consultation process charged with identifying ways to ensure full inclusion of immigrants and refugees in the state’s economic and civic life. This led to publication in 2009 of a *New Americans Agenda*,²⁷⁹ which contained scores of recommended state actions organized under 12 topic areas. The agenda’s influence is evident to this day in ongoing efforts to expand and improve the state’s English language acquisition programs, support entrepreneurship, and broaden state pathways for recognition of professional degrees and training obtained outside the United States (including an economic development bill signed by Governor Maura Healey in late 2024 that provides a new licensure pathway for internationally trained physicians²⁸⁰).

- ▶ **Coordination of language access initiatives across state agencies.** The extremely diverse nature of modern immigrant and refugee arrivals means that many state and local agencies must be prepared to address potential language barriers affecting speakers of various languages in their public-facing activities. This is both a practical matter, as states seek to protect public health and safety, as well as a requirement under federal civil rights law,²⁸¹ which seeks to ensure language barriers do not prevent individuals from accessing information or services to which they are entitled. Rather than have individual agencies or major programs within them develop individual translation and interpretation services policies and, for example, negotiate contracts with Language Line or other such entities to deliver these services, roughly ten states and dozens of localities have set an overarching policy and provide varying levels of coordination for these services. Policies in states such as New Jersey,²⁸² New York,²⁸³ and Massachusetts²⁸⁴ typically set standards for such services, require development of language access plans by state agencies and their major programs, and create coordination and technical assistance resources to guide agency efforts. Additional important goals of these laws and policies are achieving cost reductions and contracting efficiencies, given the ability of higher levels of government to aggregate demand across agencies and negotiate lower contract rates for services.

Taking steps to improve the state’s knowledge, foresight, and coordination capacities related to integration and immigration policy concerns is arguably especially important at this particular moment in the state’s and the country’s history. Rapid, large-scale changes in federal government policies, program designs, and funding have unfolded since President Trump’s second term began in January 2025. These changes, brought by executive orders, congressional action, and historic reductions in federal agency staffing, contracts, and funding, will be felt by communities across the country.

278 State of Massachusetts, “*Integrating Immigrants and Refugees into the Commonwealth*,” *Massachusetts Register* 1109, Executive Order No. 503 (July 9, 2008).

279 Governor’s Advisory Council for Refugees and Immigrants, *Massachusetts New Americans Agenda* (Boston, MA: State of Massachusetts, 2009).

280 State of Massachusetts, *An Act Relative to Strengthening Massachusetts’ Economic Leadership*, Acts of 2024, Chapter 238 (November 20, 2024).

281 See Title VI of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, Public Law 88–352, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 78 (July 2, 1964), amending U.S. Code Title 42, Chapter 21, Subchapter V, “*Federally Assisted Programs*,” accessed July 15, 2025.

282 New Jersey Division on Civil Rights, *2025 Language Access Plan* (Trenton: New Jersey Division on Civil Rights, 2025).

283 State of New York, “*Language Translation Services*,” *Laws of New York* Chapter 18, Article 10, Section 202-A (2022).

284 Massachusetts Department of Public Health, *2024–2025 Language Access Plan* (Boston: Massachusetts Department of Public Health, n.d.).

Policymakers and system leaders in Connecticut, as in all U.S. states, will likely spend years attempting to rework service designs and financing mechanisms for their major health, education, and other service systems as they adapt to new federal program approaches and funding realities. At the same time, the president's goal of mass deportation of unauthorized immigrants has left many Connecticut immigrant families living in fear of separation, while those with lawful status and even U.S. citizenship face uncertainty as their extended families, communities, and livelihoods are affected by the changing policy climate in the country. The state's employers and businesses, large and small, also face new concerns as uncertainty about the future availability of workers for a wide range of jobs settles in.

In light of the critically important roles immigrants and their families play in maintaining the state's vitality and future economic competitiveness, state and community leaders will need to find ways to weave solutions to integration policy concerns such as those presented in this report into relevant policy and system designs. Fortunately, the state has a good deal of control over the systems that support upward integration trajectories, so while federal actions may undermine or negatively affect state efforts, their ultimate success is still largely in the state's hands. This is not the case with immigration policies, where the federal government holds the determinative role. Looking to the future, however, improved state knowledge and foresight on integration and immigration needs and impacts could position Connecticut well to shape and even leverage future immigration policies, should they align with state economic development and integration goals.

Appendices

Appendix A. Data Profile of Immigrants in Connecticut

The immigrant population in Connecticut is diverse in its origins and socioeconomic characteristics.²⁸⁵ It is also a population that shows both longevity and growth. The majority of the state's immigrants had lived in the United States for 20 or more years as of 2019–23;²⁸⁶ at the same time, between 2006–10 and 2019–23, the immigrant population grew by 20 percent.²⁸⁷ Notably, immigrants have been a multiplier for the Connecticut economy, without whom the state's labor force would have shrunk.²⁸⁸

At the same time, some immigrants, particularly low-income immigrants and immigrant parents, face barriers related to limited English proficiency, limited educational attainment, and access economic supports, among others. These challenges may be of particular interest to policymakers and service providers who support these populations.

The immigrant population in Connecticut is diverse in its origins and socioeconomic characteristics. It is also a population that shows both longevity and growth.

This data profile offers a snapshot of immigrants in Connecticut across a variety of characteristics, including country of origin, income level, educational attainment, English proficiency, and more, with a particular focus on low-income immigrants and immigrant parents. It is based on Migration Policy Institute (MPI) analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, utilizing the latest available data and pooling five years of data from the 2019–23 period to ensure a larger sample size that better supports estimates for small geographies.

An Overview of Connecticut's Immigrant Population

In Connecticut, immigrants numbered 549,000 in the 2019–23 period, comprising 15 percent of the state's total population. The immigrant population is diverse in its geographic origins, with the largest shares as of 2019–23 coming from Asia (24 percent), Europe (21 percent), and the Caribbean and South America (19 percent each), as shown in Figure A–1.

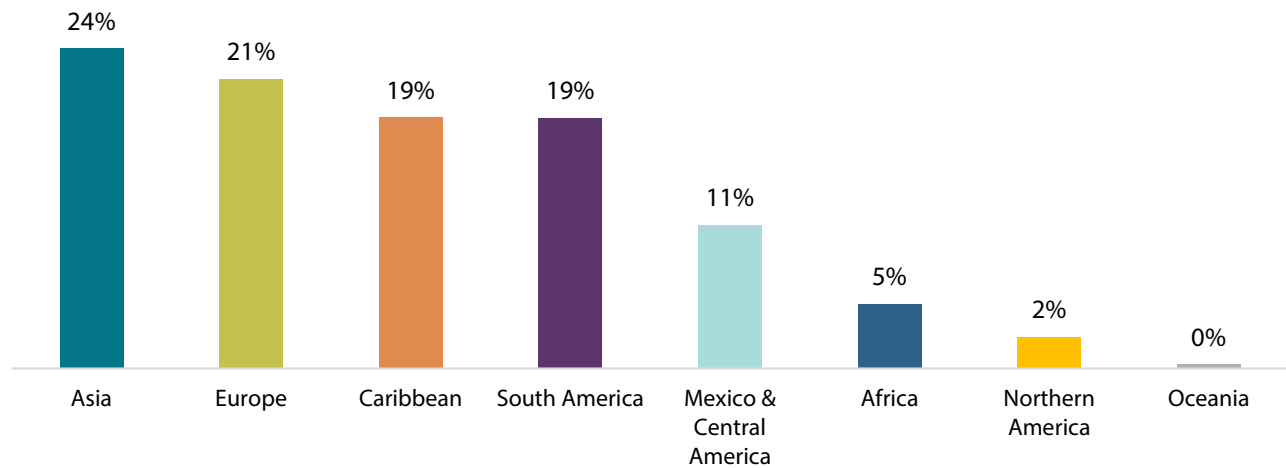
285 The term “immigrant” refers to people residing in the United States at the time of the population survey who were not U.S. citizens at birth; in this analysis, it is used synonymously with “foreign born.” The foreign-born population includes naturalized U.S. citizens, lawful permanent immigrants (or green-card holders), refugees and asylees, certain legal nonimmigrants (including those on student, work, or some other temporary visas), and persons residing in the country without authorization. The term “U.S. born” refers to people residing in the United States who were U.S. citizens in one of three categories: people born in one of the 50 states or the District of Columbia; people born in U.S. Insular Areas such as Puerto Rico or Guam; or people who were born abroad to at least one U.S.-citizen parent.

286 Unless otherwise noted, information in this section is based on Migration Policy Institute (MPI) analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS), pooled for 2019–23.

287 MPI analysis of pooled 2006–10 and 2019–23 ACS data.

288 MPI analysis of pooled 2006–10 and 2019–23 ACS data.

FIGURE A-1

Regions of Birth of Immigrants in Connecticut, 2019–23

Note: The values shown in the figure may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

Source: Migration Policy Institute (MPI) analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS), pooled for 2019–23.

As of 2019–23, the top five countries of birth for immigrants in Connecticut were Jamaica, India, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, and China/Hong Kong, with nearly equal shares of immigrants of these five nationalities (see Table A-1). Notably, a large number of Connecticut residents were also born in U.S. outlying territories, numbering 99,000 and comprising 3 percent of the total U.S.-born population in the state. Of those, 96,000 were born in Puerto Rico.²⁸⁹

The immigrant population in Connecticut is fast growing, having increased in size by 20 percent between 2006–10 and 2019–23, while the U.S.-born population declined (-0.6 percent) during the same time period.²⁹⁰ Similarly, the number of U.S.-born children with at least one immigrant parent grew by 13 percent between 2010 and 2023, while the number of U.S.-born children with only U.S.-born parents fell by 19 percent.²⁹¹ Thus, immigrants and their children have been vital for overall population growth in the state.

Connecticut's immigrants include both newcomers and many well-settled residents. In 2019–23, 14 percent of immigrants had been in the United States for fewer than five years. At the same time, more than 50 percent had 20 years or more of residency in the country.

TABLE A-1

Top Five Countries of Birth of Immigrants in Connecticut, 2019–23

Country	Number of Immigrants	Share of Total Immigrant Population
Jamaica	43,000	8%
India	38,000	7%
Dominican Republic	30,000	5%
Ecuador	28,000	5%
China/Hong Kong	25,000	5%

Source: MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data.

²⁸⁹ Puerto Rico is a U.S. territory, and the Puerto Rican population counts as part of the U.S.-born population. This section mentions this population because some of its experiences are similar to those of the immigrant population.

²⁹⁰ MPI analysis of pooled 2006–10 and 2019–23 ACS data.

²⁹¹ MPI Data Hub, "Children in Immigrant Families," accessed May 22, 2025.

MPI estimates that in 2022, Connecticut's unauthorized immigrant population numbered 122,000.²⁹² This count includes people with temporary protections, such as those with humanitarian parole, Temporary Protected Status (TPS), Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), and pending asylum applications. MPI also estimates that in 2022, about 45,000 children in the state had at least one unauthorized immigrant parent. Given the influx of migrants who came across the U.S.-Mexico border and through humanitarian parole programs in recent years, Connecticut's unauthorized immigrant population has likely grown since 2022.

Immigrants are spread throughout the state's eight counties (see Table A-2). As of 2019–23, the largest numbers lived in Fairfield, Hartford, and New Haven Counties; these three counties were home to 88 percent of all immigrants in the state, compared to 76 percent of all Connecticut residents. The eight counties also varied in terms of the immigrant share of the total county population. Fairfield had the highest share, with immigrants constituting 23 percent of all Fairfield residents.

The nationality mix of immigrants across the counties is quite different. For example, as of 2019–23, Brazilians were the top nationality in Fairfield County, Jamaicans were in Hartford County, and Mexicans were in New Haven County. In no two counties were the top five nationalities the same, suggesting a diversity among the immigrant populations of different parts of the state.

TABLE A-2

Number of Immigrants and Immigrant Share of the Population in Connecticut and by County, 2019–23

County	Total Immigrants	County Share of All Immigrants	Immigrant Share of County Population
Connecticut	549,000	100%	15%
Fairfield	217,000	39%	23%
Hartford	139,000	25%	16%
New Haven	128,000	23%	14%
New London	23,000	4%	9%
Middlesex	14,000	2%	8%
Litchfield	12,000	2%	8%
Tolland	11,000	2%	8%
Windham	5,000	1%	5%

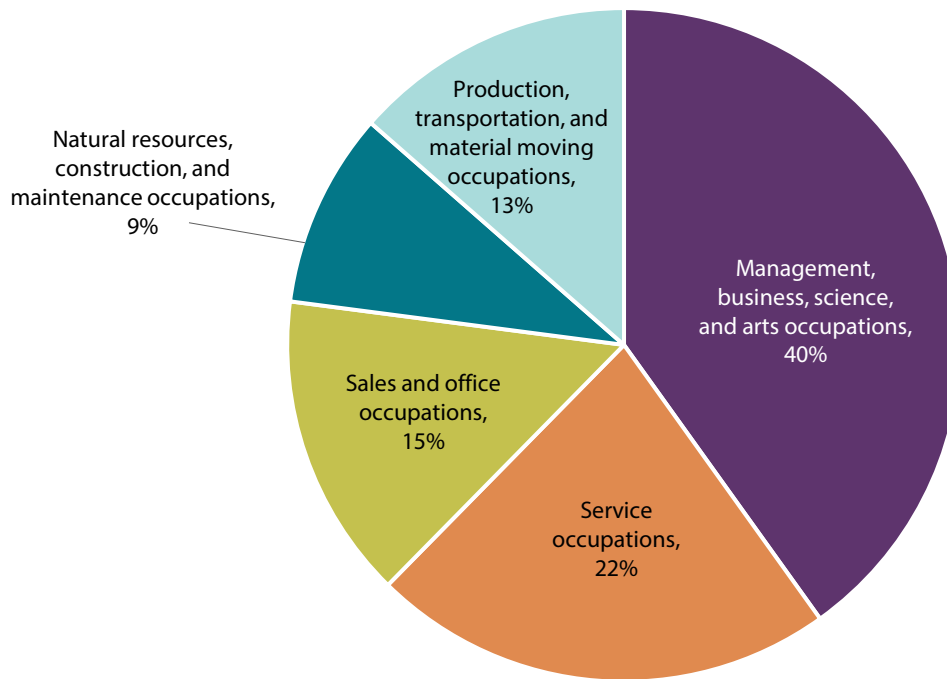
Note: The values shown in the table may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

Source: MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data.

Immigrants play an important role in the statewide civilian labor force. As of 2019–23, immigrants accounted for 19 percent of the 1.9 million total workers in Connecticut, and they were employed in a variety of occupations (see Figure A-2).

²⁹² MPI analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data from the pooled 2018–22 ACS and the 2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), weighted to 2022 unauthorized immigrant population estimates provided by Jennifer Van Hook of The Pennsylvania State University.

FIGURE A-2

Occupations of Immigrants Employed in the Civilian Workforce (ages 16 and older) in Connecticut, 2019–23

Note: The values shown in the figure may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

Source: MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data.

Immigrants have driven the state's labor force growth. Between 2006–10 and 2019–23, the number of immigrants in the labor force in Connecticut grew by 56,000, while the number of U.S.-born people in the labor force fell by 25,000.²⁹³ Thus, without immigrants, the labor force in the state would have shrunk in size.

Low-Income Immigrants

In Connecticut, 138,000 immigrants (or 19 percent of all immigrants) in 2019–23 were low income, defined as having a family income below 200 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL).²⁹⁴ Of low-income immigrants, 39 percent had a family income below 100 percent of the FPL, and 61 percent had a family income between 100 and 199 percent of the FPL.

As of 2019–23, the most common regions of origin for low-income immigrants in Connecticut were South America (23 percent), followed by the Caribbean (21 percent), Asia (19 percent), Mexico and Central America (17 percent), and Europe (14 percent). The top five countries of birth for low-income immigrants were the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Ecuador, Mexico, and Brazil (see Table A–3).

²⁹³ MPI analysis of pooled 2006–10 and 2019–23 ACS data.

²⁹⁴ The federal poverty threshold varies by family size and presence of children. In 2023, 200 percent of the federal poverty threshold was \$61,800 for a family of four, including two children under age 18. See U.S. Census Bureau, “[Poverty Thresholds by Size of Family and Number of Children](#),” updated January 23, 2025.

Notably, between 2006–10 and 2019–23, the low-income immigrant population grew by 20 percent, from approximately 115,000 to 138,000 individuals. This is comparable to the growth rate of the overall Connecticut foreign-born population in this period (20 percent).²⁹⁵

Reflecting the distribution of all immigrants across the state, Fairfield, New Haven, and Hartford Counties had the largest number of low-income immigrants in 2019–23. Low-income immigrants accounted for the largest share of all immigrants in New Haven County (28 percent), Windham and Fairfield Counties (27 percent each), followed by New London County (26 percent), as shown in Table A–4.

TABLE A–4

Number of Low-Income Immigrants and Their Share of All Immigrants in Connecticut and by County, 2019–23

County	Number of All Immigrants	Number of Low-Income Immigrants	Low-Income Share of All Immigrants
Connecticut	549,000	138,000	25%
Fairfield	217,000	58,000	27%
New Haven	128,000	36,000	28%
Hartford	139,000	29,000	21%
New London	23,000	6,000	26%
Litchfield	12,000	3,000	21%
Middlesex	14,000	3,000	23%
Tolland	11,000	2,000	17%
Windham	5,000	1,000	27%

Notes: “Low income” refers to a family income below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. County numbers may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

Source: MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data.

In Connecticut, Latinos were the largest racial/ethnic group among low-income immigrants, making up 43 percent of the state’s low-income immigrant population in 2019–23. By comparison, 20 percent identified as non-Latino White, 17 percent as non-Latino Asian American and Pacific Islander, and 16 percent as non-Latino Black (see Figure A–3).

TABLE A–3

Top Five Countries of Birth for Low-Income Immigrants in Connecticut, 2019–23

Country	Low-Income Immigrants	Share of Total Low-Income Immigrant Population
Dominican Republic	12,000	9%
Jamaica	10,000	7%
Ecuador	9,000	7%
Mexico	9,000	7%
Brazil	8,000	6%

Note: “Low income” refers to a family income below 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

Source: MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data.

²⁹⁵ MPI analysis of pooled 2006–10 and 2019–23 ACS data.

FIGURE A-3

Race/Ethnicity of Low-Income Immigrants in Connecticut, 2019–23

Notes: “Low income” refers to a family income below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Latinos can be of any race. The other racial/ethnic groups refer to non-Latinos. Black refers to non-Latino persons who reported their race as “Black alone” or “Black in combination with other race.” Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) refers to non-Latino persons who reported their race as “AAPI alone” or “AAPI in combination with other race,” except Black. White refers to non-Latino persons who reported their race as “White alone.” The remainder “other” group includes non-Latino people who reported their race as “American Indian alone,” “American Indian and White,” or unspecified multiracial groups. The values shown in the figure may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

Source: MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data.

Among low-income immigrants in Connecticut in 2019–23, 31 percent had less than a high school education, 31 percent had a high school diploma or equivalent, 18 percent had some college or an associate degree, and 19 percent had a bachelor’s or higher degree (see Table A-5). Compared to low-income U.S.-born adults in Connecticut, low-income immigrants were more likely to lack a high school diploma (31 percent versus 17 percent) and were slightly more likely to have a bachelor’s or higher degree (19 percent versus 17 percent). Among low-income immigrants who arrived in the past five years, 40 percent were college graduates.

TABLE A-5

Educational Attainment of Low-Income Immigrant and U.S.-Born Adults (age 25 and older) in Connecticut, 2019–23

	Immigrants	U.S. Born
Adults age 25 and older	114,000	329,000
No formal education	7%	2%
Less than 5th grade	3%	1%
5th–8th grade	12%	3%
9th–12th grade, no high school diploma/equivalent	10%	11%
High school diploma/equivalent	31%	38%
Some college/associate degree	18%	27%
Bachelor’s degree	12%	11%
Master’s degree or higher	7%	6%

Notes: “Low income” refers to a family income below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. The values within each column may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

Source: MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data.

As for all immigrants in Connecticut, Spanish was the top language spoken at home by low-income immigrants, being spoken by 41 percent of this population in 2019–23. The next largest language groups among low-income immigrants were English (22 percent), Portuguese (6 percent), Chinese (3 percent), and Polish (3 percent).²⁹⁶

Among low-income immigrants, 53 percent were limited English proficient in 2019–23 ... On the flip side, 26 percent of low-income immigrants spoke English very well and 21 percent spoke only English.

Among low-income immigrants, 53 percent were limited English proficient in 2019–23, meaning they reported speaking English less than “very well” in the American Community Survey, compared to 38 percent of immigrants overall. On the flip side, 26 percent of low-income immigrants spoke English very well and 21 percent spoke only English (these two groups combined are referred to as “English proficient”). In this period, 31 percent of low-income

immigrants lived in linguistically isolated homes, which the U.S. Census Bureau defines as households in which no one age 14 or older is English proficient.

As of 2019–23, 48 percent of low-income immigrants ages 16 and older were employed, while 6 percent were unemployed and 45 percent were not in the labor force (see Table A–6). Labor force participation rates varied by gender. Low-income immigrant women were less likely to be employed (41 percent) than men (57 percent) and more likely to be out of the labor force (53 percent versus 36 percent). Overall, 8 percent of low-income immigrants were self-employed, including 11 percent of men and 6 percent of women. The top occupational groups for low-income immigrants were service occupations (39 percent), followed by production, transportation, and material moving occupations (17 percent).

²⁹⁶ The ACS questionnaire asks respondents if they speak a language other than English at home. If yes, the survey asks them which one. In this data analysis, “Chinese” includes Mandarin, Cantonese, and other languages categorized by the U.S. Census Bureau as Chinese languages.

TABLE A-6

Labor Force Status and Occupational Groups of Low-Income Immigrant and U.S.-Born Civilian Adults (ages 16 and older) in Connecticut, 2019–23

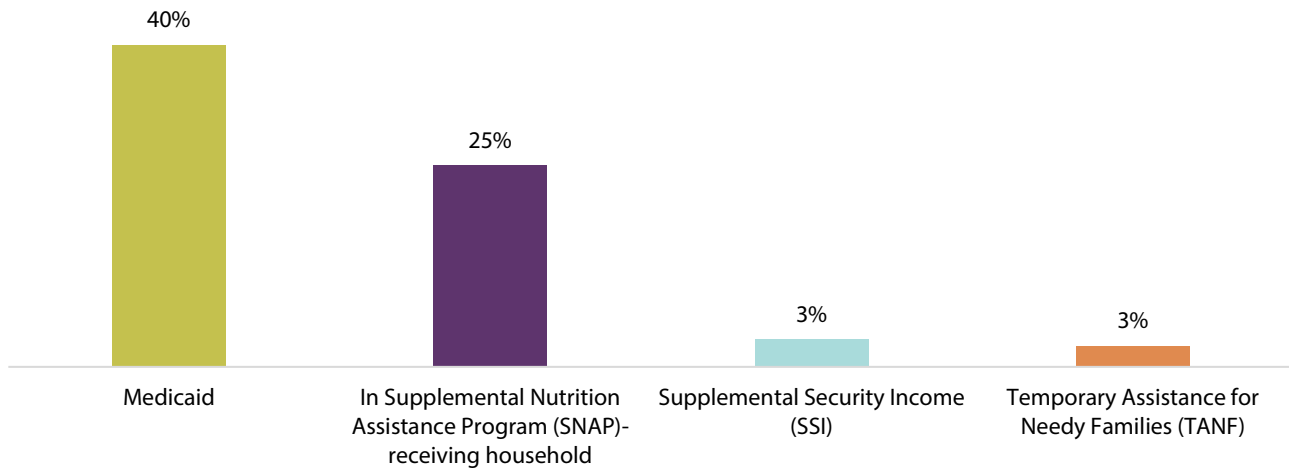
	Immigrants	U.S. Born
Labor force status: Overall		
Employed	48%	35%
Works for salary/wages	40%	31%
Self-employed	8%	4%
Unemployed	6%	8%
Not in the labor force	45%	57%
Labor force status: Men		
Employed	57%	35%
Works for salary/wages	46%	30%
Self-employed	11%	5%
Unemployed	7%	10%
Not in the labor force	36%	55%
Labor force status: Women		
Employed	41%	35%
Works for salary/wages	35%	32%
Self-employed	6%	3%
Unemployed	6%	6%
Not in the labor force	53%	58%
Occupational groups (civilian employed population ages 16 and older)		
Management, business, science, and arts occupations	15%	23%
Service occupations	39%	31%
Sales and office occupations	14%	24%
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	16%	6%
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	17%	17%

Notes: “Low income” refers to a family income below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. The values within each column by category may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

Source: MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data.

Among low-income immigrants in Connecticut, 51 percent received at least one form of public benefits in 2019–23, compared to 70 percent of low-income U.S.-born persons. The most common was Medicaid, followed by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), as shown in Figure A-4.

FIGURE A-4

Public Benefit Receipt among Low-Income Immigrants in Connecticut, 2019–23

Notes: “Low income” refers to a family income below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. The ACS asks about individual-level receipt of Medicaid, SSI, and TANF, but for SNAP asks whether anyone in the household received SNAP benefits.

Source: MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data.

In 2019–23, more than seven in ten low-income immigrants in Connecticut had some form of health insurance coverage, with 51 percent having public health insurance and 21 percent holding private health insurance (see Figure A-5). Still, 29 percent of low-income Connecticut immigrants were uninsured, compared to 5 percent of low-income U.S.-born residents of the state.

FIGURE A-5

Types of Health Insurance Held by Low-Income Immigrants in Connecticut, 2019–23

Notes: “Low income” refers to a family income below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. In this figure, persons with “public health insurance” include those with Medicare, Medicaid, or another governmental medical assistance program; those with Veterans Administration health care; and those with a combination of public and private health coverage. Persons with “private health insurance” include those with only private coverage such as employer- or union-provided insurance, insurance purchased directly, and TRICARE or other military health care. The values shown in the figure may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

Source: MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data.

Home ownership rates for low-income immigrants were slightly higher than for low-income U.S.-born people in 2019–23: 38 percent compared to 36 percent. However, 11 percent of low-income immigrants lived in an overcrowded household, defined as a household with 1.01 or more occupants per room (excluding bathrooms and unfinished basements), compared to 3 percent of their U.S.-born counterparts.

Immigrant Parents

In 2019–23, Connecticut immigrant adults (ages 18 and older) were about twice as likely to be parents of children under age 18 than the U.S. born: 32 percent versus 16 percent.

Among immigrant parents, Latinos accounted for more than one-third of parents across all child age groups shown in Table A-7: parents with young children (ages 0–5), elementary-school-aged children (ages 6–11), and middle- and high-school-aged children (12–17). The next largest racial/ethnic groups were non-Latino Asian American and Pacific Islander and White parents. For parents with older children (i.e., ages 6–11 and 12–17), more than 60 percent had resided in the United States for 15 years or more, meanwhile for parents with children under age 6, 45 percent had resided in the U.S. for 15 years or more.

TABLE A-7

Demographics of Connecticut Parents (ages 18 and older), by Nativity and Child Age Groups, 2019–23

	Parents with Children Ages 0 to 17		Parents with Children Ages 0 to 5		Parents with Children Ages 6 to 11		Parents with Children Ages 12 to 17	
	Immigrants	U.S. Born	Immigrants	U.S. Born	Immigrants	U.S. Born	Immigrants	U.S. Born
Number	177,000	501,000	70,000	203,000	88,000	219,000	90,000	240,000
% with U.S.-citizen children	89%	100%	92%	100%	89%	100%	88%	100%
Age								
25–34	18%	20%	36%	38%	16%	18%	6%	6%
35–54	75%	72%	61%	57%	80%	79%	85%	83%
55–64	5%	6%	1%	1%	3%	2%	9%	11%
65+	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%
% Women	54%	55%	54%	54%	53%	55%	54%	56%
Race/ethnicity								
Latino	35%	16%	35%	17%	38%	18%	38%	17%
Black	16%	9%	16%	10%	15%	10%	18%	10%
Asian American and Pacific Islander	24%	2%	25%	2%	24%	2%	22%	1%
White	20%	71%	20%	69%	20%	69%	20%	71%
Other	3%	2%	4%	2%	4%	2%	3%	2%
% U.S. citizens	51%	100%	43%	100%	50%	100%	55%	100%
Years of U.S. residence								
Less than 5	12%	–	16%	–	10%	–	8%	–
5 to 9	14%	–	21%	–	13%	–	9%	–
10 to 14	13%	–	18%	–	15%	–	9%	–
15 to 19	17%	–	17%	–	20%	–	16%	–
20 or more	45%	–	28%	–	42%	–	57%	–

Notes: Latinos can be of any race. The other racial/ethnic groups refer to non-Latinos. Black refers to non-Latino persons who reported their race as “Black alone” or “Black in combination with other race.” Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) refers to non-Latino persons who reported their race as “AAPI alone” or “AAPI in combination with other race,” except Black. White refers to non-Latino persons who reported their race as “White alone.” The remainder “other” group includes non-Latino people who reported their race as “American Indian alone,” “American Indian and White,” or unspecified multiracial groups. The values within each column by category may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding. Parents may appear in more than one age category if they have children who fall into different age categories.

Source: MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data.

Parents' educational attainment, English language proficiency, and income levels, among other factors, shape the ways in which they can support their children's education and development. These factors influence how parents navigate their children's schooling, communicate with medical and social service providers, and engage in the workforce.

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Immigrant parents in Connecticut were more likely than U.S.-born parents to have low or very low levels of educational attainment. In the 2019–23 period, 16 percent of immigrant parents lacked a high school diploma or equivalent, compared to 4 percent of U.S.-born parents (see Table A–8). As a result, 59 percent of all parents in the state who lacked a high school diploma were immigrants. A similar trend could be seen among low-income parents, with immigrant parents comprising 58 percent of those without a high school diploma or equivalent.

Among low-income parents, the share who held a bachelor's or higher degree was similar for immigrant and U.S.-born parents (17 percent and 16 percent, respectively). This indicates that for both groups, more educational attainment did not always protect against low-income status.

Connecticut immigrant parents' level of English proficiency was relatively similar across the child age groups discussed in this section; between 40 and 42 percent of immigrant parents were limited English proficient, while between 18 percent and 20 percent spoke only English as of 2019–23. More variation existed in the extent to which households were linguistically isolated. For example, 23 percent of parents with children ages 0–5 lived in a linguistically isolated household, compared with 20 percent of parents with children ages 6–11 and 11 percent of parents with children ages 12–17. Overall, 17 percent of all immigrant parents lived in a linguistically isolated household.

TABLE A-8

Educational Attainment of Connecticut Parents (ages 25 and older), by Nativity and Low-Income Status, 2019–23

	Parents with Children Ages 0 to 17		Parents with Children Ages 0 to 5		Parents with Children Ages 6 to 11		Parents with Children Ages 12 to 17	
	Immigrants	U.S. Born	Immigrants	U.S. Born	Immigrants	U.S. Born	Immigrants	U.S. Born
All parents	175,000	493,000	67,000	194,000	87,000	219,000	90,000	240,000
No formal education	3%	1%	4%	0%	4%	0%	4%	1%
Less than 5th grade	1%	0%	1%	0%	2%	0%	1%	0%
5th–8th grade	5%	0%	6%	0%	6%	0%	6%	1%
9th–12th grade, no high school diploma/equivalent	7%	3%	6%	3%	7%	3%	8%	4%
High school diploma/equivalent	22%	19%	22%	18%	22%	20%	25%	21%
Some college/ associate degree	19%	24%	18%	24%	18%	25%	19%	24%
Bachelor's degree or higher	43%	52%	44%	54%	42%	51%	37%	50%
Low-income parents	48,000	80,000	22,000	34,000	27,000	42,000	28,000	42,000
No formal education	6%	2%	5%	1%	6%	1%	6%	2%
Less than 5th grade	3%	0%	3%	0%	4%	0%	3%	0%
5th–8th grade	10%	2%	12%	0%	12%	1%	10%	2%
9th–12th grade, no high school diploma/equivalent	12%	10%	9%	9%	11%	10%	13%	11%
High school diploma/equivalent	33%	38%	32%	39%	31%	40%	35%	35%
Some college/ associate degree	20%	33%	19%	35%	19%	33%	20%	32%
Bachelor's degree or higher	17%	16%	19%	15%	16%	15%	14%	17%

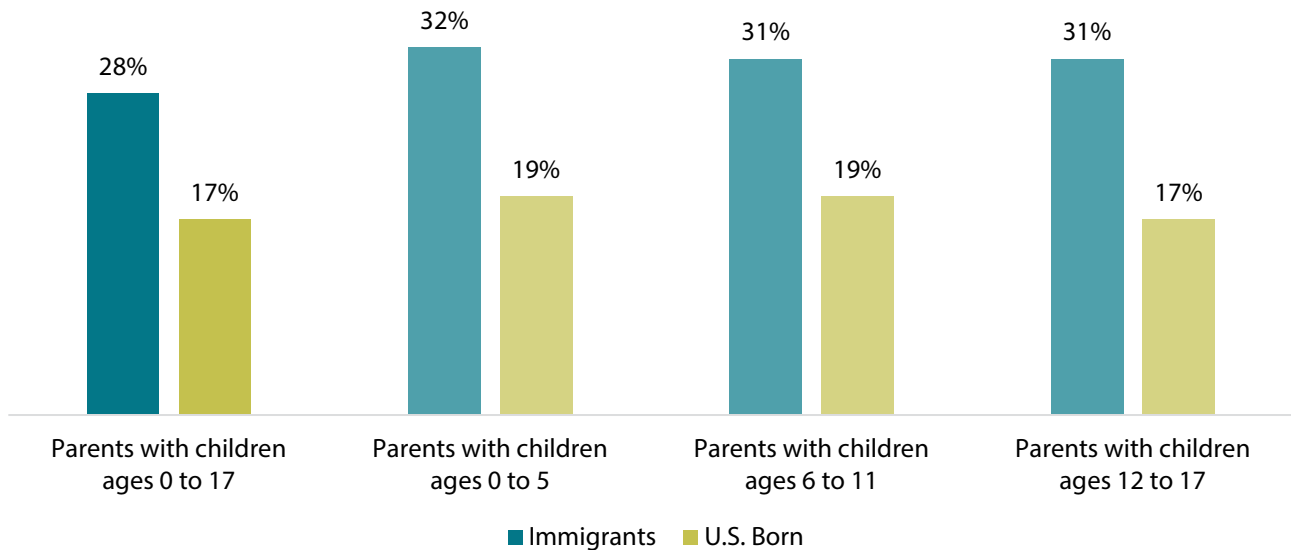
Notes: “Low income” refers to a family income below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. The values within each column by category may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding. Parents may appear in more than one age category if they have children who fall into different age categories.

Source: MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data.

Economic factors, such as income, play a role in parents' ability to support their children's path to success. The share of immigrant parents in Connecticut who were low income exceeded that of their U.S.-born counterparts in 2019–23: 28 percent versus 17 percent (see Figure A–6).

FIGURE A–6

Shares of Immigrant and U.S.-Born Parents in Low-Income Families in Connecticut, by Age of Children, 2019–23



Notes: “Low income” refers to a family income below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Parents may appear in more than one age category if they have children who fall into different age categories.

Source: MPI analysis of pooled 2019–23 ACS data.

In Connecticut, immigrant parents were notably more likely than U.S.-born parents in 2019–23 to be working poor (that is, employed and low income): 18 percent versus 11 percent. While immigrant fathers worked at the same rate as U.S.-born fathers (90 percent), immigrant mothers were less likely to work than U.S.-born mothers (67 percent versus 79 percent). For parents of children ages 0–5, an age group where child care presents unique challenges for parents, 59 percent of immigrant mothers were employed compared to 76 percent of U.S.-born mothers.

Appendix B. This Project's Advisory Board

This study was enriched by insights shared by an advisory board comprised of the following experts and community leaders in Connecticut, in addition to interviews with a wider pool of service providers, nonprofit leaders, government officials, and more. All findings and recommendations presented in this report are those of the authors.

Anka Badurina, Former Executive Director, Building One Community

Camila Bortollete, Co-Founder and Former Co-Executive Director, CT Students for a Dream

Luis Luna, Radio Producer and Community Organizer, Former HUSKY 4 Immigrants Coalition Manager

Matthew McDermott, Former Lead Organizer, Congregations Organized for a New Connecticut

Homa Naficy, Executive Director, The American Place, Hartford Public Library

Werner Oyanadel, Policy Director, Latino and Puerto Rican Sub Commission, The Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity, Connecticut General Assembly

Elena Perez Moreno, Former Executive Director, Building One Community

Beverly Redd, Executive Director, Upper Albany Main Street Project

Sarah Rendón García, Assistant Professor, Human Development and Family Sciences, University of Connecticut

Jessica Richardson, Executive Director, Immigration Support and Advocacy Center

Susan Schnitzer, President and CEO, Connecticut Institute for Immigrants and Refugees

Cheila Serrano, Director of Social Services, Junta for Progressive Action

Lindsay Wyman, President and CEO, Mercy Learning Center

About the Authors



MARGIE MCHUGH

Margie McHugh is Director of the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy. The Center is a national hub for leaders in government, community affairs, business, and academia to obtain the insights and knowledge they need to respond to the challenges and opportunities that today's high rates of immigration pose for communities across the United States. It provides in-depth research, policy analysis, technical assistance, training, and information resource services on a broad range of immigrant integration issues.

Ms. McHugh's work focuses on education quality and access issues for immigrants and their children from early childhood through K-12 and adult, postsecondary, and workforce skills programs. She also leads the Center's work seeking a more coordinated federal response to immigrant integration needs and impacts, and more workable systems for recognition of the education and work experience immigrants bring with them to the United States.



JULIA GELATT

Julia Gelatt is Associate Director of MPI's U.S. Immigration Policy Program. Her work focuses on the legal immigration system, demographic trends, and the implications of local, state, and federal U.S. immigration policy. Dr. Gelatt previously worked as a Research Associate at the Urban Institute, where her mixed-methods research focused on state policies toward immigrants, barriers to and facilitators of immigrant families' access to public benefits and public pre-kindergarten programs, and identifying youth victims of human trafficking.

Dr. Gelatt earned her PhD in sociology, with a specialization in demography, from Princeton University, where her work focused on the relationship between immigration status and children's health and well-being. She earned a bachelor of the arts in sociology/anthropology from Carleton College.



COLLEEN PUTZEL-KAVANAUGH

Colleen Putzel-Kavanaugh is an Associate Policy Analyst with MPI's U.S. Immigration Policy Program, where she focuses on the U.S.-Mexico border, including analysis of trends in border arrivals, migration at and between ports of entry, migrant processing, and the role of nongovernmental organizations in border communities.

Previously, Ms. Putzel-Kavanaugh conducted research and worked with asylum seekers at the U.S.-Mexico border; interned with the Bipartisan Policy Center, the office of San Diego Mayor Todd Gloria, and Al Otro Lado; and taught 7th and 8th grade. She holds a bachelor's degree in English literature from Assumption College and a master's of peace and justice degree from the University of San Diego's Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies, where she focused on human rights, immigration, and corruption.



KATHERINE HABBEN

Katherine Habben is an Associate Policy Analyst at MPI's National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy, where she focuses on early childhood education and care policies related to integration of immigrant-origin children. Prior to joining MPI, she worked as a researcher on the International Child Centered Curriculum Erasmus+ project, creating handbooks and materials for educators and international families to utilize during young children's transition into formal early childhood education and care. She is an experienced early childhood educator, working and training with several international and bilingual kindergartens in Berlin.

Ms. Habben holds a master's degree from Trinity College Dublin in social policy and practice with a comparative focus on early childhood education and care policy in Ireland and Germany, and a BA in philosophy from Western Illinois University.



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Jacob Hofstetter is a Policy Analyst at MPI's National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy, where he conducts research related to language access as well as educational and workforce policies and service designs for immigrant adults and youth. His work focuses on the civic, economic, and linguistic integration of immigrants and refugees in the United States.

Previously, Mr. Hofstetter worked as a Research and Policy Associate at the Massachusetts Appleseed Center for Law and Justice, interned for Refugee Services of Texas, worked as a Legal Services Coordinator for Human Rights First in Houston, and spent a year as a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant in Spain. He holds a master's degree in global policy studies with a focus on immigration and refugee policy from the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas, Austin, and a BA in history from Miami University.



JULIE SUGARMAN

Julie Sugarman is Associate Director for K-12 Education Research at MPI's National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy, where she focuses on issues related to immigrant and English Learner students. Among her areas of focus: policies, funding mechanisms, and district- and school-level practices that support high-quality instructional services for these youth, as well as the particular needs of immigrant and refugee students who first enter U.S. schools at the middle and high school levels.

Dr. Sugarman came to MPI from the Center for Applied Linguistics, where she specialized in the evaluation of educational programs for language learners and in dual language/two-way immersion programs. She earned a BA in anthropology and French from Bryn Mawr College, an MA in anthropology from the University of Virginia, and a PhD in second language education and culture from the University of Maryland, College Park.

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