



## NYC South Asian Civic Engagement Initiative Policy priorities for the 2012 State and General Election

### **Who We Are:**

The NYC South Asian Civic Engagement Initiative is a coalition based effort of community-based South Asian organizations including [Chhaya Community Development Corporation \(coordinator\)](#), [Adhikaar](#), [Council of Peoples Organization \(COPO\)](#), [India Home](#), [Indo-Caribbean Alliance](#), [Richmond Hill Economic Development Corporation \(RHEDC\)](#), [SEVA](#), [South Asian Youth Action \(SAYA\)](#), [South Asian Council for Social Services \(SACSS\)](#) and [Sakhi for South Asian Women](#). The NYC South Asian Civic Engagement Initiative strives for the South Asian community's concerns to be on the public agenda and believes that the first step is getting community members civically engaged. Activities include coordination of candidate forums, meetings with key elected officials and candidates, registering voters and GOTV work including phone banking and door knocking near election dates.

South Asians—immigrants from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and the countries that border those nations, including Afghanistan, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Tibet, and the Maldives, as well as Diaspora populations from places such as the Caribbean, South America, and Africa—is one of New York City's fastest growing ethnic populations. The City's South Asians increased in number from 113,857 in 1990 to an estimated 294,925 in 2010, according to the U.S. Census, a growth rate of more than 159 percent. (Note this estimate does not include the significant Indo-Caribbean community, which is not adequately counted by the U.S. Census.)

According to the 2000 U.S. Census profile of New York City, 60 percent of the Bangladeshi population, 48 percent of the Pakistani population and 27% of the Indian population was limited English proficient (LEP). Since 2000, there has only been a slight reduction in the language proficiencies.

As a collective of South Asian American organizations, below are the major priorities for the 2012 State and General Elections:

### **Language Access**

New immigrant communities, especially small communities speaking low-incidence languages, need meaningful language access to ensure justice is not denied due to language barriers, i.e. ensure immigrants have language access when interacting with different systems including family court system, police medical facilities, etc. Institutions and agencies that immigrants must go through should be made accessible by having culturally competent and linguistically adept staff. Language access should also ensure the inclusion of immigrants in larger national processes, i.e. voter rights that continue to ensure language assistance.

### **Creation and Expansion of Culturally Appropriate and Safe Spaces**

Because of issues of isolation and a lack of support for specific populations, there is a need for culturally appropriate, safe spaces such as community centers - particularly for Muslims, Indo-Caribbean, South Asian women, seniors and youth.

### **Immigration Reform**

Immigrants make up more than one in five New Yorkers and the population of immigrants continues to increase. However, current immigration policy is very restrictive, as well as racist and allows for unjust detention and detention practices that tear families apart. There is a growing need for immigration reform as well as more meaningful resources provided for current immigrants.

### **Accountability and Independent Oversight of Law Enforcement**

South Asians along with other minority communities have been the target of unjust racial and religious profiling, some of which has been sponsored by discriminatory federal and state legislation. There is a need for legislation that allows for more accountability and independent oversight of law enforcement.

### **Bias-based harassment and anti-discrimination**

South Asians, amongst other immigrants have had a long history of being the victims of hate crimes and various forms of both de jure and de facto discrimination. Post 9/11, bias-based harassment and antagonism towards South Asians have heightened significantly. We support existing anti-discrimination legislation and legislation that combats bias-based harassment in various institutions and push for a stronger enforcement of this legislation. We also see a growing need for an expansion of legislation that addresses anti-discrimination and hate crimes/bias-based harassment including those protecting populations such as Muslims, Sikhs and youth.

### **Home for Good: Addressing housing justice and the need for affordable housing**

As the housing crisis continues to affect communities across the country, South Asians, in particular low-income, senior and special need populations within the group, are faced with a growing number of housing issues. Along with the lack of affordable housing units, South Asians are challenged with problems like overcrowding, poor and unstable housing conditions. South Asians are among New York City's fastest growing ethnic populations, experiencing a growth rate of more than 159 percent in the past decades. Seeing this growth, the need for stable and affordable housing becomes even more pressing. There is a need for policy that addresses and accounts for the housing needs of South Asian and immigrant communities. Beyond the heightened need of affordable housing, we ask that policy also address the foreclosure crisis that has hit our communities and that leaders pass policies that stop needless foreclosures, expand affordable housing, address accessibility to sustainable homeownership i.e. expansion of the forms of credit that are accepted, expansion of refinancing opportunities, revision of down-payment requirements, In-language, pre- and post- home-purchase education and support.

### **Worker's Rights**

As the South Asian population grows, there is a growing need for increased language access and social services for low-income workers so that workers are made more aware about their rights and are enabled to fight against workplace injustices such as exploitation, unpaid wages or trafficking, and further advocate for themselves in claiming their right to fair labor standards and dignity no matter what type of work they are involved in. Although domestic workers were able to advocate in New York successfully for the country's first form of a bill of rights for domestic workers, domestic workers, as well as other low-income workers continuously suffer from inadequate conditions such as a lack of minimum wage, no access to health care, no paid sick days, or paid time off. These struggles, although recognized

in law and policy, must also be implemented through the provision of accessible social services for workers as well as awareness and education among both employees and employers.

**Other Specific Areas of Concern:**

- Police oversight [to stop discriminatory policing practices that target specific communities, i.e. ensure that survivors of domestic violence feel safe to call the police]
- Access to Public Resources for support services
- Access to Health Care - The community, regardless of their immigration status, must be provided with basic health care and services, both preventive and treatment, in addition to health education and awareness.
- Availability of family counseling and substance abuse programs in South Queens
- Enable homeowners to bring basement apartments up to code and offer as an affordable housing option.