

# Pennsylvania's \$48.8 Million Settlement Over Immigrant Benefits Stemmed from the Ridge Administration's Interpretation of Federal Law

Recently Pennsylvania reached a settlement with the federal government to pay \$48.8 million over five years. The settlement resolves claims that Pennsylvania used federal funds to provide Medicaid, food stamps, and TANF benefits to non-citizens who were not eligible for them.

- **This settlement stemmed from a dispute over the Ridge administration's interpretation of federal law.**
  - The 1996 federal welfare reform law (called PRWORA) barred the use of federal funds for certain benefits to legal immigrants who have been in this country for less than five years.
  - The administration of Governor Tom Ridge interpreted the law differently from the federal government, and did not bar recent legal immigrants from these benefits.
  - The “five-year bar” to immigrant eligibility for Medicaid was implemented by Governor Rendell in July 2009.
  
- **The immigrants who received benefits were here legally.**
  - For decades, Pennsylvania's Department of Human Services has required proof of applicants' legal immigration status, and has checked that status through the federal government's SAVE database .
  - Benefits are only issued to immigrants who are here lawfully and eligible for benefits.
  - Although Pennsylvania may have improperly billed the federal government for benefits for recent immigrants, the individuals who received them had proper immigration status and would have been eligible for federal funding if they had been here for five years or more.