

# Immigration Reform

America is a country founded on immigration. With the exception of Native Americans and Inuits, every person in this country either came from, or has ancestors who came from another country. We must honor this legacy by reforming immigration into a program that provides a path to citizenship for those wishing to become Americans. Do those promising words on the Statue of Liberty still ring true? "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Currently, there are over 11 million undocumented workers in America and many have misconceptions about this group of people. Some of the most common misconceptions held by Americans are that undocumented workers don't pay taxes and are taking American jobs. Both couldn't be further from the truth. The IRS Commissioner stated "The IRS determined between 1996 and 2003, undocumented workers paid 50 billion in federal taxes." They may not pay all the taxes a documented worker does, but they pay much more than nothing. Additionally, studies have determined that immigration has no negative affect on American workers. In fact, several have found that immigration actually has a positive net effect for many America workers. This is because immigrants are both workers and consumers, and their presence in the United States increase demand for products and services within the United States. So overall, undocumented workers pay at least some taxes and help spur our economy forward. Instead of kicking out undocumented workers, we must create legal pathways to citizenship. Deporting them would do nothing to benefit our country.

One way to ensure that jobs are available to Americans is to base the future caps on livelihood based immigration on labor market needs not arbitrary caps determined by Congress. The allocation of employment visas should be handled by an independent commission that would regularly assess labor market needs, and base the allowed number of immigrant workers on that assessment. This would ensure that American workers would have first crack at American jobs. We should also reform the Guest Worker Program which too often denies basic civil rights to immigrant workers. All guest workers should be covered by U.S. labor laws and receive the prevailing wage in their job classification net of recruitment agency fees. These requirements of the fundamental rights of pay and civil rights will regulate future demand for guest workers since lower pay and lack of rights are key reasons employers seek out guest workers.

A lack of legal pathways to citizenship in America is the biggest reason people come to America illegally. By opening more avenues for legal immigration, we will lessen the amount of undocumented workers. The wait to immigrate to America legally can be 12 to 28 years, depending on the country you are immigrating from. Being found in America illegally adds another 10 years to the wait before you can even apply to become a U.S.

citizen. So, if you are caught and deported you could wait 38 years to receive citizenship, this is unacceptable. Immigrants who have proven that they positively contribute to the U.S. economy should be able to bypass this long wait and be able to directly apply for legal residency that leads to citizenship.

Many people come to this country as children. Yet we persecute them as if they had a choice in how they came to reside in America. The Dreamers Act would allow those children who were brought to America illegally before the age of 16 a pathway to citizenship. These children have grown up in America, and attended American schools; they are Americans in every way except paperwork.

Without comprehensive reform, millions face deportation or have already been deported. This tears apart families and communities, as many undocumented people have children who are US citizens. The United States has a long tradition of valuing and supporting families. Immigration reform must strive to keep families together and give equal treatment to same sex partner's families. We must call on our lawmakers to pass comprehensive immigration reform and allow those already here a path to American citizenship. Let us honor the words on the Statue of Liberty and welcome all who desire to live in this great country.