

5 Reasons Law Enforcement Officials Support Immigration Reform

1. The Current Broken Immigration System Promotes Illegality.

The vast majority of undocumented immigrants stay in this country for the opportunity to make a living and achieve the American dream. If possible, they would choose to come legally, but the current immigration system does not provide avenues to do so in most cases. As a result, they come without authorization in desperation to improve their situation.

- Many of these individuals fill lower-skilled jobs for which there are very few permanent visas available (less than 5,000 per year), and often no guest worker visas.
- Immigrants with family members who might sponsor them for green cards may face a 15- to 20-year wait for those visas, being separated from their family for as long as a generation.
- Employers continue to have difficulty recruiting and retaining workers in the United States in many of these occupations, which U.S. workers increasingly shun, such as agriculture, food processing and menial jobs.

Reform Will Encourage Legal Immigration and Support Employers Following the Law. Permitting the current undocumented immigrants to apply for a legal, provisional status while they work to earn permanent residence and providing future immigrants with legal avenues to enter the country will help local businesses hire legal employees and broaden the legal labor market for agriculture, landscaping and other lower-skilled jobs. Reform is necessary to promote compliance with a revised legal immigration system by both workers and employers.

2. Immigration Reform Will Undermine Criminal Enterprises.

While some immigrants enter the United States with help from family members or friends, increasingly, sophisticated criminal organizations are involved in unauthorized entry, providing false documents, crossing guides, transportation, safe houses and other supports, all for large fees. Some of these organizations are also involved in drug smuggling and may force immigrants to become “mules” in exchange for passage. Drug cartels charge immigrants additional “tolls” to cross their territory to come to the United States, and increasingly smuggling organizations will force immigrants into labor or prostitution to pay back claimed fees, turning smuggling into trafficking. Migrants face extortion, kidnapping and violence on their journey north.

Once in the United States, many undocumented immigrants must resort to identity theft, facilitated by criminal organizations, to gain documents with which to carry out their daily lives of driving, banking and cashing checks. For immigrants who only wished to work and earn a living, the lack of legal immigration avenues has bred a black market for illegal immigration

criminal support organizations. By reforming our immigration system and replacing these illegal pathways for immigration with legal ones, these criminal enterprises will no longer have a group of vulnerable people to prey upon.

3. **Immigration Reform Will Improve Community Policing Efforts.**

For otherwise law-abiding immigrants who may be undocumented, their greatest fear is being caught and removed from the country — greater than the fear of criminals operating in their communities. In fact, criminals can use the fear of deportation to coerce these immigrants into silence. Undocumented immigrants may be afraid to call authorities when criminal activity is happening in their neighborhoods or when they are victims of crime, and sometimes go so far as to fail to call an ambulance when someone is sick or injured. For law enforcement officers charged with public safety, this situation creates breeding grounds for criminal enterprises and undermines safe communities.

Providing a Provisional Legal Status to the Undocumented Will Bring Them Out of the Shadows. Just like first-time offenders often are given probation and the chance to make themselves right with the law, allowing these individuals who otherwise would be productive, law-abiding members of society the opportunity to register for a provisional status is common sense. Individuals who earn their way to full legal status and the opportunity to apply for citizenship will dry up the customer base for the illegal activities that previously endangered them, enable themselves to assist law enforcement to clean up their neighborhoods and contribute to the tax base that pays for community policing.

4. **Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements as Part of Immigration Reform Can Help Ensure that Foreign Criminals Don't Move into Our Communities.**

The consensus on immigration reform is that it must also improve border security. Current legislative proposals include specific provisions for border security, including:

- Investments in technology and additional Border Patrol agents.
- Requirements for specific security metrics to be met.
- Accountability to Congress and the taxpayers through oversight by the Government Accountability Office, new oversight commissions and regular reporting to Congress.

In addition, proposals in Congress as part of immigration reform would improve enforcement of employment verification laws so that employers are held accountable for hiring only legal workers, along with an electronic verification system to enable them to check employees' credentials. Additional efforts to root out fraudulent immigration and visa applications through increased criminality and penalties for fraud, along with progress toward an entry-exit system that would enable the government to identify visa overstayers will improve the integrity of the immigration system.

Making State and Local Police into Immigration Enforcers is Not the Answer. State and local law enforcement need the trust of their communities to do their primary job, which is to protect the public. Otherwise law-abiding immigrants (who do not engage in criminal activity themselves) do not pose a threat to most communities. But if local law enforcement enforce

immigration laws, such immigrants will be even more fearful of acting against the true criminals. State and local law enforcement agencies are already very resource-strapped. Chasing after waiters, busboys, janitors and produce-pickers should be a lower priority than dealing with drug dealers and criminal gangs.

5. Immigration Reform Will Allow Law Enforcement Resources to Focus on Serious Criminals and Threats.

Federal immigration agencies, including Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), do not have the capacity or resources to remove all undocumented immigrants. Border agents are focused on major transnational criminal organizations that bring drugs, guns and violence to our streets. Yet, they must spend many of their resources apprehending and removing immigrants who have no criminal background or affiliation and are merely seeking to work or reunite with family.

Leaders of the federal immigration agencies have argued for a long time that the best way to secure the border is to remove the “hay” in the haystack in order to find the “needle.” In other words, by allowing those who pose no threat to come forward, undergo background checks and be identified easily in the future, law enforcement can use its limited resources to focus on the true threats. Then they can further intelligence-driven and risk-based policing without the need for military buildup along our borders or intrusive immigration enforcement in our communities.