



## **Statement for the Record**

### **U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary – Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, and Border Safety**

#### **Hearing on "Removing Barriers to Legal Migration to Strengthen our Communities and Economy"**

**March 15, 2022**

The National Immigration Forum (the Forum) advocates for the value of immigrants and immigration to the nation. Founded in 1982, the Forum plays a leading role in the national debate about immigration, knitting together innovative alliances across diverse faith, law enforcement, veterans, and business constituencies in communities across the country. Leveraging our policy, advocacy, and communications expertise, the Forum works for comprehensive immigration reform, sound border security policies, balanced enforcement of immigration laws, and ensuring that new Americans have the opportunities, skills, and status to reach their full potential.

The Forum appreciates the opportunity to provide its views on the solutions to remove the barriers to legal migration to strengthen our communities and economy. Immigrants have long been crucial in helping to build a more prosperous and diverse country that can live up to the promise of the American Dream. However, the available legal avenues for immigrants to enter or remain in the U.S. have been severely curtailed in recent years. In turn, net international migration (NIM) to the U.S. between 2020 and 2021 added only 247,000 to the nation's population, the lowest level in decades.<sup>1</sup> This is partly due to Covid-19 but is also largely attributable to choices made by policymakers in Washington, D.C., who have opted to reduce immigration levels.

According to the Census Bureau, last year's NIM represents a significant drop from the 2015-16 peak, where more than a million immigrants were added to the U.S. population. This most recent data represent a significant drop from the 477,000 added between 2019

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Net International Migration at Lowest Levels in Decades*, December 21, 2021. Available at <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/12/net-international-migration-at-lowest-levels-in-decades.html>



and 2020, partly reflecting the impact of Covid-19, but also the restrictionist immigration policies of the previous presidential administration.<sup>2</sup> The statistics highlight that Florida, Texas, New York, California, and Massachusetts — states which typically gain the most migrants from abroad and comprise about half of all international migration — saw decreases in NIM between 2015 and 2021, including a nearly 50% drop between 2020 and 2021. California experienced the most significant decline of these states, dropping from 148,000 in 2015 to 15,000 in 2021.<sup>3</sup> This decline has reduced the number of potential workers, adding pressure to the widespread labor shortages that the United States is currently undergoing.<sup>4</sup>

Besides the historic low immigration levels, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) — the federal agency that processes green cards, visas, and employment authorization documents for immigrants — is struggling with a massive backlog and processing delays. USCIS has more than 8 million pending applications, with the number of pending employment authorization applications surging from 676,000 in March 2020 to 1.4 million as of October 2021.<sup>5</sup> This colossal backlog is worsening America's labor shortage, with applicants facing lengthy waits to obtain visas and work authorization. Also, processing times for citizenship applications have surged during the pandemic, increasing from an average of nine months in 2019 to more than a year now. Furthermore, there are 281,259 pending Temporary Protected Status (TPS) applications, 412,796 pending applications for asylum, and 770,386 pending green card applications.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Arturo Castellanos Canales, *America's Labor Shortage: How Low Immigration Levels Accentuated the Problem and How Immigration Can Fix It*, National Immigration Forum, February 28, 2022. Available at <https://immigrationforum.org/article/americas-labor-shortage-how-low-immigration-levels-accentuated-the-problem-and-how-immigration-can-fix-it/>

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Net International Migration at Lowest Levels in Decades*, December 21, 2021. Available at <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/12/net-international-migration-at-lowest-levels-in-decades.html>

<sup>4</sup> National Immigration Forum, *Why Businesses Should Support Immigration Reform*, National Immigration Forum, March 10, 2022. Available at <https://immigrationforum.org/article/why-businesses-should-support-immigration-reform/>.

<sup>5</sup> Rafael Carranza, *Thousands of essential immigrant workers languishing amid federal processing backlog*, *azcentral*, January 25, 2022. Available at <https://amp.azcentral.com/amp/9165749002>

<sup>6</sup> Jesse Canales, *Thousands of migrants out of work due to delays at U.S. Immigration Services*, *Spectrum News*. Available at <https://www.mynews13.com/fl/orlando/news/2022/01/26/uscis-delays-impacting-tens-of-thousands-of-workers?web=1&wdLOR=c7B55F519-3EEA-4AD5-A235-6AE1025BEBF5>



All the barriers to legal migration mentioned above are worrying from a demographic, national security, and economic perspective. From a demographic perspective, barriers to legal immigration accentuate the already worrying contraction of the U.S. population.<sup>7</sup> Last year the United States' population grew at the lowest rate in its history — it grew only by 390,000 or 0.1%.<sup>8</sup> Notably, immigration — even at reduced levels — made up a majority of the population growth with 247,000 people.<sup>9</sup> In terms of national security, low immigration levels are leaving unfilled openings in crucial industries that are essential to maintain America's military strength and global stature.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, from an economic perspective, immigrants are critical economic agents. Immigrant workers make up 17.4 percent of the labor force in the United States.<sup>11</sup> They pay taxes, buy local products, run 28% of all "Main Street" businesses that supply necessities — such as gas stations, grocery stores, laundromats, and restaurants. Also, first- and second-generation immigrants have founded around 45% of the leading high-tech companies in the United States.<sup>12</sup> Immigrant households earn around \$1.5 trillion in total income, wielding significant spending power that powers local economies. They also pay more than \$300 billion in federal, state, and local taxes.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, the Forum endorses legislation aimed at creating and enhancing the legal avenues to attract and retain foreign nationals in the United States. Among the many

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<sup>7</sup> Ali Noorani and Danilo Zak, *Room to Grow: Setting Immigration Levels in a Changing America*, National Immigration Forum, March 2021. Available at <http://immigrationforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Room-to-Grow.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Miriam Jordan and Robert Gebeloff, *Amid Slowdown, Immigration Is Driving U.S. Population Growth*, The New York Times, February 5, 2022. Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/05/us/immigration-census-population.html?searchResultPosition=1>

<sup>9</sup> The Washington Post Editorial Board, *The U.S. needs more immigrants and more babies*, Washington Post, February 7, 2022. Available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/02/07/us-needs-more-immigrants-more-babies/>

<sup>10</sup> Council on National Security and Immigration (CNSI), *High-Skilled Immigration: America's Key for Competitiveness and National Security*, September 23, 2021. Available at <https://cnsiusa.org/2021/09/resources-09232021-01/>

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Foreign-born workers made up 17.4 percent of labor force in 2019*, May 29, 2020, available at <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2020/foreign-born-workers-made-up-17-point-4-percent-of-labor-force-in-2019.htm>

<sup>12</sup> National Immigration Forum, *High Tech: Immigrants are Indispensable to U.S. Workforce*, March 28, 2019. Available at <https://immigrationforum.org/article/high-tech-immigrants-are-indispensable-to-u-s-workforce/>

<sup>13</sup> National Immigration Forum, *Why Businesses Should Support Immigration Reform*, March 10, 2022. Available at <https://immigrationforum.org/article/why-businesses-should-support-immigration-reform/>



immigration-related bills introduced in Congress, there are some bipartisan, common-sense bills that would help remove the barriers to legal immigration and consequently detonate America's full potential.

Among them, the American Dream and Promise Act of 2021 would provide a permanent solution to Dreamers and TPS holders.<sup>14</sup> The America's Cultivation of Hope and Inclusion for Long-term Dependents Raised and Educated Natively (CHILDREN) Act of 2021 would provide a pathway to citizenship to Documented Dreamers.<sup>15</sup> The Let Immigrants Kickstart Employment (LIKE) Act would provide new immigration alternatives to high-skilled foreign-born entrepreneurs in the U.S.<sup>16</sup> The Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act<sup>17</sup> and the Conrad State 30 & Physician Access Act<sup>18</sup> would increase the number of immigrant doctors able to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and work in medically underserved communities. The Equal Access to Green Cards for Legal Employment (EAGLE) Act would equalize green card backlogs by eliminating per-country caps for employment-based visas and raising per-country caps for family-based visas.<sup>19</sup> The Farm Workforce Modernization Act would create a pathway to legalization for undocumented agricultural workers.<sup>20</sup>

Reforming the U.S. immigration system is an economical, social, and national security imperative. Our nation would benefit from needed immigration reforms to provide

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<sup>14</sup> National Immigration Forum, *Bill Summary for American Dream and Promise Act of 2021*, March 12, 2021. Available at <https://immigrationforum.org/article/bill-summary-american-dream-and-promise-act-of-2021/>.

<sup>15</sup> National Immigration Forum, *Bill Summary for America's CHILDREN Act of 2021*, November 18, 2021. Available at <https://immigrationforum.org/article/bill-summary-for-americas-children-act-of-2021/>. "Documented Dreamers" refers to the more than 200,000 children who came to the United States as dependents of their parents' visas who are in danger of "aging out" at 21 and being forced to self-deport. As a result of being Documented Dreamers, these young people are often overlooked, left out of policies and solutions meant for Dreamers because they are technically not undocumented.

<sup>16</sup> Arturo Castellanos Canales, *Bill Analysis: Let Immigrants Kickstart Employment Act*, National Immigration Forum, September 7, 2021. Available at <https://immigrationforum.org/article/bill-analysis-let-immigrants-kickstart-employment-act/>.

<sup>17</sup> Danilo Zak, *Bill Analysis: The Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act*, National Immigration Forum, May 6, 2020. Available at <https://immigrationforum.org/article/bill-analysis-the-healthcare-workforce-resilience-act/>.

<sup>18</sup> S.948 - Conrad State 30 and Physician Access Reauthorization Act. Available at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/948/text>

<sup>19</sup> National Immigration Forum, *Bill Summary: The EAGLE Act*, July 8, 2021. Available at <https://immigrationforum.org/article/bill-summary-the-eagle-act/>.

<sup>20</sup> Danilo Zak, *Bill Summary: Farm Workforce Modernization Act*, National Immigration Forum, November 19, 2019. Available at <https://immigrationforum.org/article/bill-summary-farm-workforce-modernization-act/>.



permanent solutions for Dreamers, the agricultural workforce, and other essential workers. These reforms can help address ongoing labor shortages, fill job openings in key sectors dependent on immigrant labor, strengthen the U.S. economy, and address long-term demographic shortfalls.