

# Compassionate Immigration Reform

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“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.”

In 1903, the poem "The New Colossus," by U.S. poet Emma Lazarus was engraved on a bronze plaque and mounted inside the lower level of the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty. These words have been adopted by our immigrant nation and have comforted generations of immigrants who have come to our shores in search of a better life for themselves and their families.

Whether fleeing war, oppression or extreme poverty, millions of immigrants have “Come to America” in search of freedom and with the hope of attaining basic human needs.

Sadly, the people of our nation have also turned their backs on immigrants. It seems like each new wave of immigrants to the United States has found a less and less welcoming environment from those who have come here before them. This is true today for the millions of Latino immigrants and others who are facing some of the worst discrimination in our nation’s history. Latinos, many of whom come to the United States on foot fleeing poverty and violence, have been demonized, arrested, imprisoned and deported as anti-immigrant sentiment has grown in our nation.

Immigrants, most of whom take very low-paying jobs in important sectors of society, such as food production, are making great contributions to our nation. Today’s petition offers a chance to add your voice to the call for compassionate immigration reform.

In a July, 2014 letter to Pres. Barack Obama, faith leaders throughout the nation told the president to “end inhuman immigration enforcement,” and to legislate a pathway to citizenship for the immigrants who are already living here.

We are asking our nation’s political leader to “Stop deportations immediately” as a first step. Every day, more than 1,000 people are being forced from their homes and sent back to countries of origin that many fled for fear of poverty, hunger and violence.

We are asking our government to “Expand deferred action to immigrant workers and their families.” Pres. Obama can use the power of the presidency to keep families together by granting deferred action to those immigrants already living within U.S. borders.

We also call on our government to “Protect unaccompanied children who have sought refuge within the U.S.” Let’s give the children fleeing violence in Latin America due process hearings to be considered for refugee status. Mercy and relief for children desperate to escape gang- and drug-related violence are needed now.

Here in North Carolina, we call on our state leaders to follow the same path toward justice for immigrants by allowing immigrants to get driver licenses and to attend public colleges at in-state tuition rates. As a nation of immigrants, we must stand on the side of love with immigrant families. The religious community must not ignore the moral call to help those who are suffering. As citizens of the world, we must respect the inherent worth and dignity of all. Let us welcome the tired, the poor and those huddled masses yearning to be free.

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## Reasons Why the U.S. Economy Needs Immigrants

### **1. Immigrants are more likely to be entrepreneurial and to start new businesses, which, in turn, create jobs for U.S.-born workers.**

- Immigrants started 28 percent of all new U.S. businesses in 2011, employing one in 10 U.S. workers.
- Immigrants represent 18 percent of small business owners in the United States—exceeding their share of the overall population (13 percent)—and are more likely than those born in the U.S. to start a small business. Immigrant-owned small businesses employed an estimated 4.7 million people and generated an estimated \$776 billion in receipts in 2007. More small business owners are from Mexico than any other country.

- Over the past two decades, immigrants made up 30 percent of the growth in small business creation.

### **2. Both high- and low-skilled immigrant labor creates additional jobs across the U.S. economy.**

- With immigration reform, newly authorized immigrant workers would produce enough new consumer spending to support 750,000 to 900,000 jobs.
- Every additional foreign-born student who graduates in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM) and remains in the U.S. creates an estimated 2.62 American jobs.
- Every low-skilled, non-agricultural, temporary worker who comes to the U.S. to fill a job that may otherwise be left open creates an average of 4.64 U.S. jobs. These low-skilled jobs are the necessary backbone to support higher-skilled positions.
- Passage of the DREAM Act would add \$329 billion to the U.S. economy and create 1.4 million new jobs by 2030.

### **3. Immigrants boost tax revenue, enlarge the taxpayer base, and help to keep down the price of goods.**

- On average, immigrants, including the undocumented, pay nearly \$1,800 more in taxes than they receive in benefits.
- Households headed by undocumented immigrants paid \$11.2 billion in state and local taxes in 2010. That included \$1.2 billion in personal income taxes, \$1.6 billion in property taxes and \$8.4 billion in sales taxes.

### **4. As baby boomers retire, immigrants will increasingly be critical for continued economic growth and for ensuring a steady flow of new workers.**

- Without immigrants, the U.S. will not have enough new workers to support retirees. Seventy years ago, there were 150 workers per 20 seniors; 10 years ago, there were 100 workers per 20 seniors. By 2050, there will be only 56 workers for every 20 seniors. The U.S. needs new taxpayers to help fund Social Security and Medicare and new workers to fill retirees' positions and provide their health care services.
- Current levels of immigration will temper the aging of the U.S. population over the next two decades, slowing the increase in the old-age dependency ratio by more than one-quarter.
- Nearly 65 percent of Latino immigrants in California who stayed more than 30 years are homeowners, making them a critical pool to buy the homes of baby boomers as they downsize.

*This fact sheet is a product of the AS/COA Hispanic Integration and Immigration Initiative, which advances the integration of immigrants and promotes positive dialogue around the economic contributions of immigrants and Latinos overall across the United States, and was produced by Jason Marczak, Director of Policy, in collaboration with Leani Garcia. For more information, visit AS/COA Online at: [www.as-coa.org](http://www.as-coa.org). For media inquiries or to speak with an expert on this topic, please contact Adriana LaRotta in our communications office at: [alarotta@as-coa.org](mailto:alarotta@as-coa.org).*