

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-221, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
H-232, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Richard Durbin
Chairman
The U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jerrold Nadler
Chairman
U.S. House Committee on the Judiciary
2141 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Bernard Sanders
Chairman
The U.S. Senate Budget Committee
624 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Yarmuth
Chairman
U.S. House Committee on the Budget
204 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

June 24, 2021

Dear Leader Schumer, Chairman Durbin, Chairman Sanders, Speaker Pelosi, Chairman Nadler and Chairman Yarmuth,

We represent more than 90 non-profit organizations, workers' centers, and labor unions working with essential workers from 24 states and the District of Columbia and write to respectfully request that you include a pathway to citizenship for essential workers in the jobs and infrastructure budget reconciliation package that Congress is currently considering. You have already had a great impact by passing the American Rescue Plan, but you have the opportunity to make an enormous impact on the lives of millions of immigrants, their families, and our country this year. Over the last 16 months, the COVID-19 pandemic has made visible that which we already knew but too often overlooked -- that the millions of undocumented immigrants who care for our children and elderly family members while we work, ensure that the grocery store shelves are stocked, keep our trains and buses running, provide health care, construct our infrastructure, and do many other types of work are essential members of our communities, our society, and our economy. They are already Americans who have put their lives and those of their families at risk throughout the pandemic, even if they lack the formal documentation. As we confront the economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, which has claimed the lives of more than 580,000 Americans, including protections for immigrant essential workers is crucial to building a robust foundation for recovery by addressing deep-seated racial, gender, and economic inequities.

Earlier this year, Senators Alex Padilla (D-Calif.) and Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) introduced the Citizenship for Essential Workers Act in the U.S. Senate as did Representatives Joaquin Castro (D-Tex.) and Ted Lieu (D-Calif.) in the U.S. House of Representatives. The Citizenship for Essential Workers Act provides long-overdue recognition by placing millions of essential workers and their families on a pathway to citizenship. The bill is a crucial step to fulfill the promise of Build Back Better to increase our prosperity and alleviate poverty for millions. Nearly 1 in 5 individuals in the total U.S. essential workforce are immigrants, and more than 5 million are undocumented immigrants.¹ Most undocumented essential workers have lived in the U.S. for more than a decade and live with U.S. citizen household members -- they are part of our families, our communities, our economy, and we rely on them.² Yet, immigrant workers have also been most at risk during the pandemic and have been left out of the federal stimulus aid. An estimated 74 million adults who were essential workers and their household members in the United States were at increased-risk of COVID-19,³ yet many essential workers lacked access to personal protective equipment (PPE) -- just 16 percent of big-box store workers had access to masks and 4 percent of fast food workers.⁴

Providing a pathway to citizenship for essential workers will be a boon for our recovering economy. A recent study by the Center for American Progress found that providing a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who are essential workers would increase the cumulative U.S. Gross Domestic Product over the next decade by \$989 billion and create 203,200 new jobs.⁵ Providing a pathway to citizenship for essential workers would lift a sizable number of US households out of poverty. A 2016 study by the Migration Policy Institute found that work authorization provided through the Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA) program would have lifted approximately 100,000 poor families out of poverty and led to a 6 percent reduction in the poverty rate.⁶ The longer term impacts of citizenship would be even greater. The Citizenship for Essential Workers Act would also help protect workers across the country by improving worker protections. Undocumented immigrants both suffer workplace rights violations at far higher numbers⁷ and are less

¹ FWD.US, "Immigrant Essential Workers are Crucial to America's COVID-19 Recovery," (Dec. 16, 2020), <https://www.fwd.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/FWD-essential-worker-report-FINAL-WEB.pdf>.

² *Id.*

³ Thomas M. Selden and Terceira A. Berdahl, "Risk of Severe COVID-19 Among Workers and Their Household Members," *JAMA Internal Medicine*, (Nov. 19, 2020), <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamainternalmedicine/fullarticle/2772328>.

⁴ Daniel Schneider and Kristen Harknett, "Essential and Unprotected: COVID-19-Related Health and Safety Procedures for Service-Sector Workers," (May 2020), <https://shift.hks.harvard.edu/files/2020/05/Essential-and-Unprotected-COVID-19-Health-Safety.pdf>.

⁵ Giovanni Peri and Reem Zaiour, "Citizenship for Undocumented Immigrants Would Boost U.S. Economic Growth" *Center for American Progress*, (June 14, 2021), <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/reports/2021/06/14/500433/citizenship-undocumented-immigrants-boost-u-s-economic-growth/>.

⁶ Randy Capps, et al., Migration Policy Institute, *Deferred Action for Unauthorized Immigrant Parents: Analysis of DAPA's Potential Effects on Families and Children*, Feb. 2016, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/DAPA-Profile-FINALWEB.pdf>. See also, Sherrie Kossoudji and Deborah A. Cobb-Clark, "Coming out of the Shadows: Learning about Legal Status and Wages from the Legalized Population," *Journal of Labor Economics* (2002).

⁷ Annette Bernhardt, et al., Broken Laws, "Unprotected Workers: Violations of Employment and Labor Laws in America's Cities," (2009), available at <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1vn389nh>; Josselyn Andrea Garcia Quijano, "Workplace Discrimination and Undocumented First-Generation Latinx Immigrants," 2020, <https://crownschool.uchicago.edu/advocates-forum-2020-workplace-discrimination-undocumented-immigrants>.

likely to complain about conditions because of heightened barriers, such as the threat of immigration-based retaliation. Legal status and a pathway to citizenship for essential workers and their families would provide workers stability and added security making it easier to enforce their workplace rights, and improving standards by leveling the playing field for all workers.⁸

As workers' rights groups from across the country, we see first hand how a pathway to citizenship for workers and their families is important to our communities, our workplaces, and our country. We call on Congress to act on the promise it made by labeling immigrant workers as essential workers and respectfully request that you include a pathway to citizenship for essential workers in the next budget reconciliation package.

Sincerely,

Unions

American Federation of Teachers

Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO

National Education Association

Office & Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU)

Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU)

Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

AFGE Local 548 (FL)

AFSCME Local 154, DC37 (NY)

SEIU USWW (CA)

UAW Region 9A (NY)

UNITE HERE Local 11 (AZ, CA)

Workers United/SEIU, New York New Jersey Regional Joint Board (NY/NJ)

Organizations

350 Sonoma (CA)

9to5 (Nat'l)

⁸ See, e.g., Adriana Kugler and Patrick Oakford, "Comprehensive Immigration Reform Will Benefit American Workers," *Center for American Progress*, (Sept. 12, 2013), <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/reports/2013/09/12/74014/comprehensive-immigration-reform-will-benefit-american-workers/>.

A.Y.U.D.A INC (DC, MD, VA)
ADAPT Montana (MT)
Adult Family Home Council (WA)
Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, Inc. (ABLE) (OH)
Albatross Training Solutions (IL)
ALIGN (NY)
American Friends Service Committee (Nat'l)
American Friends Service Committee, Colorado (CO)
Arriba Las Vegas Worker Center (NV)
Autistic Self Advocacy Network (Nat'l)
Black and Brown United in Action (CT)
Border Workers United (TX)
Brazilian Women's Group (MA)
California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation (CRLA Foundation) (CA)
Carroll Gardens Association (NY)
Casa Latina (WA)
Causa of Oregon (OR)
Climate Justice Alliance (Nat'l)
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA) (CA)
COLAGE (Nat'l)
Colorado Jobs with Justice (CO)
Colorado Organization for Latina Opportunity and Reproductive Rights (COLOR) (CO)
Comunidades Sin Fronteras CSF (CT)
Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF) (CT)
Connecticut Worker Center (CT)
CTUL (MN)
Detroit Disability Power (MI)
Dominican Development Center, Inc. (MA)
Dreamers Mothers In Action (DMIA) (Nat'l)

Employee Rights Center (CA)
Encuentro (NM)
Equal Rights Advocates (Nat'l)
Essential Ohio (OH)
Faith in Public Life Action Fund (Nat'l)
Fe y Justicia Worker Center (TX)
Food Empowerment Project (Nat'l)
Friends of Public Banking Santa Rosa (CA)
Futures Without Violence (Nat'l)
Graton Day Labor Center (CA)
Hand in Hand: The Domestic Employers Network (Nat'l)
Jobs With Justice (Nat'l)
Justice for Migrant Women (Nat'l)
La Conexion (OH)
Legal Aid at Work (CA)
Little Lobbyists (Nat'l)
Long Beach Alliance for Clean Energy (CA)
Maine People's Alliance (ME)
Mainers for Accountable Leadership (ME)
Miami Workers Center (FL)
Migrant Justice / Justicia Migrante (VT)
National Black Worker Center (Nat'l)
National Employment Law Project (Nat'l)
National Immigration Law Center (Nat'l)
New Jersey Alliance for Immigrant Justice (NJ)
New Mexico Caregivers Coalition & New Mexico Caregivers In Action (NM)
New Orleans Workers Center for Racial Justice (LA)
North Bay Jobs with Justice (CA)
NY Nail Salon Workers Association (NY)

OLÉ Education Fund (NM)
Oxfam America (Nat'l)
Pacific Community Ventures (CA)
Parents Together Action (Nat'l)
Personal Attendant Coalition of Texas (TX)
PHI (Nat'l)
Pilipino Workers Center of Southern California (CA)
Public Justice Center (MD)
REACH Resource Centers on Independent Living-Fort Worth, Dallas, Denton & Plano, TX (TX)
Shriver Center on Poverty Law (IL)
Street Level Health Project (CA)
Supermajority (Nat'l)
The Workers Lab (CA)
Unidad Latina en Accion CT (CT)
United Nations Association Sonoma County Chapter (CA)
WeCount! (FL)
Women and Girls Foundation of Southwest Pennsylvania (PA)
Women Working Together USA (FL)
Workers Defense Action Fund (TX)
Worksafe (CA)