

AFL-CIO

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

House Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship
HEARING: IMMIGRANTS AS ESSENTIAL WORKERS DURING COVID-19
Wednesday, September 23, 2020

The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) is a federation of 56 unions that represents 12.5 million working men and women, including those who have been laboring on the front lines throughout the pandemic. We strive to ensure that every person who works in this country receives decent pay and benefits, safe working conditions, fair treatment, and full due process. Our members work in every state in the union and every sector of the economy, and they come from every region of the world. We represent working people of all immigration status, including undocumented workers, guestworkers, asylum seekers, refugees, legal permanent residents and citizens. It is their needs and realities that inform our statement for this hearing.

The COVID-19 pandemic reveals just how interconnected we are as it threatens everyone in our country. Working people are all in this together, and we need our government's responses to reflect that reality. However, the federal relief packages passed to date have shamefully excluded millions of families who help to build, serve and feed our nation. These gaps in coverage elevate pandemic risk levels in every workplace and community.

Everyone in our country, regardless of immigration status, must be able to access needed testing, treatment, public health information, and relief benefits if we are to successfully contain the coronavirus outbreak and rebuild our economy. This is among the many reasons we need the Senate to pass the HEROES Act without further delay.

The pandemic has shone a light on structural failings that the labor movement has long fought to address. Too many people are forced to work outside of the formal economy or are misclassified, with no access to health care coverage and the social safety net. It also has revealed the systemic undervaluing of work that is now clearly understood to be essential for our survival. Much of this essential work is performed by immigrants and people of color, who also must confront structural racism and an inhumane immigration system. Now is the time to address these core failures.

First responders, other essential workers, and millions of people who return to work each day face great danger from exposure to the virus, yet the administration has refused to take even the most basic measures to keep our workplaces and workers safe. America's unions are demanding a focus on economic essentials and continue to insist that OSHA issue an Emergency Temporary Standard to protect working people from occupational exposure to infectious diseases, including

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COVID-19. We have put forward a concrete agenda to keep all workers safe amidst the pandemic and reform systems that, for too long, have allowed a subclass of exploitable workers and treated workers as disposable commodities in the global economy.

Among the millions of essential workers serving our country throughout the pandemic are hundreds of thousands of working men and women with TPS and DACA. Despite their vital work, they now find their lives and livelihoods at elevated risk as a result of President Trump's cruel efforts to terminate these programs. Our entire workforce has benefited from TPS and DACA, which have helped to raise wages, support a stable workforce and reduce exploitation in our country. We will all be harmed if these vital workers are needlessly stripped of their status, and the impact will be even more damaging amid the pandemic. The work permits of TPS and DACA holders must immediately be extended, and the Senate should pass the Dream and Promise Act without further delay.

We have a long way to go to achieve justice in our immigration and economic systems, and the current crisis has created an opportunity to make important strides forward. America's unions will continue to push for a broad path to citizenship for all of the millions of people whose labor helps our country to prosper, and to reject efforts to exclude, criminalize and disempower our nation's workers.

We renew our call for a response to this health and economic crisis that prioritizes all workers, including immigrant and nonimmigrant workers. No worker of any status should ever have to risk her life or family for the sake of a job. Nor should any worker have to risk deportation for reporting to work or demanding safe and just treatment.

Officials at all levels of government must act with urgency to ensure that all workers, regardless of immigration status, have meaningful safety supports when reporting to work. Every working family needs access to medical testing and treatment, income replacement, cash payments and other vital benefits. We are all in this together, and none of us will be safe until all of us are safe

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