



April 28, 2021

Chair Zoe Lofgren
House Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member Tom McClintock
House Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Hearing “Why Don’t They Just Get in Line?” Barriers to Legal Immigration

Dear Chair Lofgren & Ranking Member McClintock:

On behalf of the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA), the largest statewide immigrant rights organization in California, I submit this statement for the record for today’s hearing entitled “Why Don’t They Just Get in Line?” Barriers to Legal Immigration”. CHIRLA is a member of the Value Our Families campaign. Value Our Families is a network of local and national community-based and advocacy organizations who are committed to protecting, preserving, and strengthening the U.S. family immigration system.

I write to express CHIRLA’s strong support for Sen. Menendez’ (S.348) and Rep. Sanchez’ (H.R.1177) U.S. Citizenship Act, which would create a path to citizenship for all the 11 million undocumented immigrants currently living in the U.S., including those who arrived as young children, those protected under Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), Temporary Protected Status (TPS) recipients, essential workers and their family members. Crucially, the bill also includes key elements of [Representative Judy Chu’s Reuniting Families Act](#),

which would reduce family immigration visa backlogs and [promote humane and timely reunification of immigrant families](#).

Problems With Our Immigration System

The current U.S. immigration system is antiquated and harmful because it has not adapted to new economic and social realities, at home and globally. It also fails to recognize the full humanity and dignity of immigrants. Today, the vast majority of immigrants coming to the U.S. through the family-based system, diversity lottery and refugee program are underrepresented people of color. Due to years of bureaucratic processing delays and Congress's inability to address these long-outdated policies, many remain unable to be sponsored and remain undocumented because the immigration system has backlogged their cases in a decades-long pipeline. Currently, there are close to 4 million family-members in line to be sponsored through the family-based preference categories ¹. Nationals from Mexico, the Philippines, India, Vietnam and China have the longest wait times.

Additionally, there are several inadmissibility bars to people obtaining green cards through family sponsorship. These bars referred to as the three-year, ten-year and permanent bars to inadmissibility prevent immigrants who qualify for a green card from receiving one if they were in the U.S. without status for more than six months unless they remained outside the U.S. for at least three years, and ten years for those in the U.S. for more than one year. Eliminating the bars would allow millions of immigrants living in the U.S. to make use of the existing legal immigration process and adjust their status.

¹Annual Report of Immigrant Visa Applicants in the Family-sponsored and Employment-based preferences Registered at the National Visa Center as of November 1, 2019, https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/visas/Statistics/Immigrant-Statistics/WaitingList/WaitingListItem_2019.pdf



Legalization

CHIRLA supports a legalization program that is inclusive and provides undocumented immigrants with the opportunity to emerge from the shadows and attain permanent legal status with a pathway to citizenship. In the U.S. there are currently 11 million undocumented immigrants who form the backbone of many sectors of the economy and who during the COVID-19 pandemic have put their lives on the line to help our country stay afloat, providing medical care, working in the fields, stocking our grocery shelves, and other frontline roles. Many remain undocumented because they are stuck in the backlogs, others because they do not qualify for family unification, work permit or humanitarian relief currently available under our immigration system.

Accordingly, CHIRLA believes an immigration program must be attainable, affordable, expedient, unifying and equitable. We were very pleased to see President Biden announce his immigration reform bill, the U.S. Citizenship Act on Day One of his administration, and U.S. Sen. Menendez (S.348) and Rep. Sanchez (H.R.1177) introduced it in Congress in February. This immigration reform bill is the justice and legalization that our country desperately needs and of which our communities have sought for years.

The Reuniting Families Act in the U.S. Citizenship Act

The inclusion of Congresswoman Chu's bill in the U.S. Citizenship Act (H.R.1177 and S.348) presents a major victory for the Value Our Families campaign as we have worked tirelessly to defend the family-based system from the never-ending attacks by the Trump administration.

The Reuniting Families Act would resolve these problems. It would:





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- clear the family-based and employment-based backlogs, raise the country caps and reclassify lawful permanent residents as immediate relatives, provide relief for orphans, widows and stepchildren and protect the families of H-4 visa holders from losing work authorization or status;
- promote and preserve diversity by increasing diversity visas;
- provide equality for same sex partners in our immigration laws; and
- provide enforcement relief in our immigration system through eliminating the 3- and 10-year bar and providing family unity waivers of some inadmissibility and deportability grounds.

As Congress considers potential reform to the U.S. immigration system, it should center its priorities around reuniting families while promoting diversity. CHIRLA believes that the U.S. Citizenship Act (H.R.1177 and S.348) as well as the Reuniting Families Act offer solutions and need to be passed by Congress and sent to President Biden's desk forthwith. These bills would fix the current legal avenues available to immigrants and would ultimately establish a fair legalization process for the 11 million undocumented immigrants.

Thank you for your consideration of this statement. Should you have any questions, you can reach me at lcastro@chirla.org.

Sincerely,

Luz Castro
National Policy Advocate
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)

