



September 23, 2020

Chair Zoe Lofgren
Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship
Washington, DC 20515-6216

Vice Chair Pramila Jayapal
Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship
Washington, DC 20515-6216

Ranking Member Ken Buck
Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship
Washington, DC 20515-6216

RE:, “Immigrants as Essential Workers During COVID-19”

Dear Chairwoman Lofgren, Ranking Member Buck and members of the Immigration and Citizenship Subcommittee,

On behalf of Adoptees For Justice and Adoptee Rights Law Center we are honored to submit this statement for the record for today’s crucial hearing entitled “Immigrants as Essential Workers During COVID-19”.

Established in 2018, Adoptees For Justice is an intercountry adoptee-led organization with over 40 members both in the U.S. and abroad. Adoptees For Justice serves to represent the interests of the international and domestic adoptee community especially regarding those individuals who do not have citizenship. We educate, empower, and organize transracial and transnational adoptee communities to achieve just and humane adoption, immigration, and restorative justice systems. We envision a world where every person thrives in a safe and supportive environment in which communities of color, immigrants, and adoptees are liberated from all forces of injustice, with full citizenship for all.



The Adoptee Rights Law Center is a Minnesota-based law firm and a nationally recognized resource for legal issues impacting domestic and intercountry adoptees in the United States. It represents numerous intercountry adoptees across the country, whether dealing with proof of U.S. citizenship or navigating U.S. immigration laws to secure U.S. citizenship through naturalization or other means.

We thank the members of the subcommittee for including the adoptee community in this hearing to understand the effect of COVID-19 on immigrants serving as essential workers.

A Center for Immigration Studies report found 69 percent of all immigrants in the labor force and 74 percent of undocumented workers are essential infrastructure workers, compared to 65 percent of the native-born labor force. Some of these individuals are not entitled to any form of governmental assistance and face losing their jobs, being evicted from their homes, and family separation due to deportation. Our immigrant workforce put their lives on the line during this pandemic to keep our economy going, to make sure other US Citizens have the essentials, and to ensure a sense of normality.

Some intercountry adoptees that are essential workers are finding out that they do not have U.S. citizenship, which should have been afforded to them at the finalization of their adoptions when they were children. Intercountry adoptees have been legally adopted by U.S. citizen parents but due to clerical errors, lack of information, or parental negligence the adoptee did not acquire citizenship. Now during this pandemic impacted adoptees are losing jobs in the essential worker workforce because they cannot get their work permits renewed. They are also struggling as they are unable to receive government assistance, and some face fear of deportation.

Adoptees that are essential workers are experiencing hardships due to barriers to:

- Rental assistance
- Driver Licenses
- Federal Stimulus Relief
- Work Permits
- Fear of deportation
- LPR Adjustments

Intercountry adoptees without U.S. citizenship disproportionately bear the brunt of national crises. Whether it is increased scrutiny surrounding identity documents after 9/11 or legal citizenship issues that impair full participation in their communities, intercountry adoptees---



particularly those of working age and born prior to 1983---face insurmountable hurdles and expensive legal proceedings to secure what their adoptive parents and U.S. policy should have provided to them long ago: United States citizenship.

During the health and economic crisis associated with COVID-19, clients of the Adoptee Rights Law Center have struggled to maintain employment and care for their families. Its clients, for example:

- lack sufficient proof of citizenship to secure or retain benefits and employment or, at a very basic level, lack the financial ability to renew permanent resident cards or to seek naturalization on account of USCIS fees that are far beyond their means (and are expected to increase significantly in October).
- come to ARLC as adults, some more than forty years of age, after discovering that they are not U.S. citizens, either after they could not obtain a U.S. passport or could not produce proof of citizenship and sufficient identification documents required for employment.
- are unemployed and cannot obtain unemployment insurance benefits during COVID-19 because so-called “non-expiring” green cards that the INS issued decades ago are no longer valid—and renewals take nearly a year or more for processing;
- have effectively dropped out of employment today and are living in the shadows of American society, fearing deportation not because of how they have lived most of their adult lives as children of U.S. citizen parents but instead because they committed a non-violent crime decades ago while a young adult. Even if the crime is not one that would likely result in deportation, the current anti-immigrant atmosphere in the United States today has caused ARLC clients to remove themselves from full participation in society.
- cannot work and cannot transport and properly care for family members impacted by COVID-19, typically because they lack citizenship and cannot renew an expired state-issued driver’s license. One client, who is now sixty-four, retired from the Social Security Administration after twenty-three years of employment. She cannot return to work today and cannot transport her husband to medical appointments because her permanent resident card expired long ago and at a time when she fully believed she was already a U.S. citizen.

Adoptees For Justice and Adoptee Rights Law Center thanks the members of the subcommittee for including the adoptee community in this hearing highlighting the needs of immigrants serving as essential workers during COVID-19. We urge members to bear in mind the urgency and importance of granting retroactive citizenship to all internationally adopted Americans during



this pandemic, protecting adoptees' rights, and ensuring equality between adopted and biological children of U.S. citizens by passing H.R.2731, the Adoptee Citizenship Act of 2019.

Sincerely,

Kristopher Larsen
Executive Director
Adoptees For Justice

Gregory D. Luce
Founder and Attorney
Adoptee Rights Law Center