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CONGRESSWOMAN SHEILA JACKSON LEE OF TEXAS

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP

HEARING ON:
“IMMIGRANTS AS ESSENTIAL
WORKERS DURING COVID-19”

2141 RAYBURN

2:00 P.M.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2020



- Thank you, Chairman Lofgren and Ranking Member Buck, for convening this important hearing on *“Immigrants As Essential Workers During COVID-19”* to explore the various roles that immigrants play in building a strong and sustainable economy.
- Let me thank our witnesses for their helpful testimony and assistance:
 1. **Vicente Reyes**, a 20-year-old farmworker, DACA recipient, and son of undocumented farmworkers.

2. **Haeyoung Yoon**, Senior Policy Director, National Domestic Worker's Alliance.

3. **Tom Jawetz**, Vice President, Immigration Policy, Center for American Progress.

4. *Dimple Navratil, Owner of Dimple's Imports, Racine, Wisconsin (Minority Witness).*

- The COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated for all to see the extraordinary contributions of immigrant workers and how dependent our economy and way of life is on them.
- Essential workers bring the food supply from farm to market, they also clean and sanitize public spaces, care for our children, they tend to the elderly, and they play an increasingly larger role in our health care system.
- Madam Chair, the COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the fundamental role that immigrants have long played in key sectors of our economy.
- On March 18, 2020, DHS issued guidance identifying “essential critical infrastructure workers” to include jobs that are frequently filled by immigrant workers, including those involving agriculture, food processing, distribution, maintenance, and sanitation.
- DHS has continued to expand the definition of essential workers to include those who provide childcare for other essential workers.
- Now, according to a recent study, 19.8 million immigrants are now considered essential workers.
- Prior to the crisis, the United States healthcare industry was already experiencing a significant shortage of healthcare workers and was reliant upon immigrant workers to supplement the larger workforce.

- In New York, for example, it is estimated that at least one in three healthcare workers—approximately 400,000 individuals—are immigrants.
- Nationwide, nearly 351,600 healthcare workers are undocumented, an estimated 11,600 healthcare workers hold Temporary Protected Status (TPS), and 29,000 are recipients of deferred action under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program.
- Unfortunately, the impact of COVID on this workforce has been and will continue to be severe; already more than 1,100 health care workers have lost their lives serving their communities in battling this pandemic.
- Attributable in large part to the aging baby boomer population, there is also a serious shortage of home healthcare workers, particularly in rural areas of the country.
- As nursing homes continue to struggle with the spread of COVID-19, home healthcare aides have become an even more critical component of elder care.
- More than 3.5 million additional health care workers will be needed by 2030 to provide direct care to the more than 13 million elderly and disabled Americans who desperately need it, especially during nontraditional shifts that are difficult to fill, such as nights, holidays, and weekends.
- And, of course, immigrants have long been essential to maintaining our nation's food supply.
- Due to a diminishing supply of native-born U.S. workers willing to perform migrant manual labor, agricultural employers have become increasingly dependent on foreign workers to meet their labor demands.
- According to a California Farm Bureau survey, 55 percent of farmers reported labor shortages in 2017 and it is estimated that agricultural output would decline by \$30 to \$60 billion without undocumented farmworkers.

- Approximately half of immigrant farmworkers are undocumented and the average foreign-born farmworker has lived in the United States for 18 years, developing skills crucial to the continued viability of our country's farms.
- Immigrants also represent 22 percent of all workers in the broader food industry; 68 percent of those who grade and sort agricultural products and 42 percent of food processors and packagers.
- In the food industry alone, a tenth of the workforce is undocumented.
- According to the Center for Migration Studies, more than 1 million undocumented workers are employed in essential retail sectors, including restaurants and grocery stores, and approximately 661,000 work in essential services.
- The number of immigrants employed in the childcare and early education services sector has increased by almost 250 percent, while the number of native-born workers has only grown by 38 percent.
- Overall, about 20 percent of the nearly 2 million early childhood educators in the United States are immigrants and they are more likely to work as private home- and family-based childcare workers than those who are native-born.
- Shamefully, more than one in five immigrant early childcare workers currently live below the poverty line.
- With most care facilities now closed and many schools operating remotely in whole or in part, millions of parents are now juggling the need to work from home while caring for their young and school-age children.
- For parents who are essential and must continue to report to work outside the home, closed care facilities and remote education has spurred a serious childcare crisis.

- According to the Bipartisan Policy Center, 78 percent of essential workers can no longer rely on their previous childcare arrangements, and 63 percent report that finding such care is difficult.
- I am very much looking forward to discussing with our witnesses the added challenges that undocumented immigrants face during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the need to provide protections to these workers through legislative reforms.
- Thank you, Madam Chair, I yield back my time.