

**National Immigration Law Center’s Statement for the Record  
Submitted to Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Immigration Integrity, Security, and  
Enforcement**

“The Impact of Illegal Immigration on Social Services”

Thursday, January 11, 2024 at 10:00AM

Dear Chairman McClintock, Ranking Member Jayapal, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a written statement on behalf of the National Immigration Law Center (NILC). We respectfully request that this statement be made part of the record for the January 11, 2024 House Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Immigration Integrity, Security, and Enforcement’s hearing, “The Impact of Illegal Immigration on Social Services.”

**Introduction**

The National Immigration Law Center (NILC) is a leading advocacy organization in the United States, dedicated to defending and advancing the rights and opportunities of low-income immigrants and their families. We focus on issues that promote the well-being and economic security of immigrants and their families: health care and safety net programs; education and training; workers’ rights; and federal and state policies affecting immigrants. We have decades of experience advocating for policies that improve the lives of immigrants and their families, as well as established relationships with immigrant and community organizations across the country for whom we provide technical, policy, and advocacy assistance.

Immigrants are good for the country. The United States has benefitted from immigrants throughout its history, welcoming people who arrived without resources yet became entrepreneurs and political leaders. When we excluded immigrants who had fled violence and oppression, such as when we turned away Jewish refugees in World War II, history has viewed these actions with shame. Instead of closing our borders to people seeking a haven in the U.S., we should be looking to empower and support cities and states to help all community members thrive.

**Immigrants Have a Positive Economic Impact**

Immigrants are essential to the economy of the United States. While they [comprise](#) fourteen percent of the country’s population, they account for 17% of the gross domestic product.<sup>1</sup> They [pay](#) \$524 billion in taxes and have \$1.4 trillion in spending power.<sup>2</sup> Research has affirmed the critical role that immigrants play in supporting the national economy. While first generation immigrants and refugees who meet eligibility requirements benefit from initial investments and social services, subsequent generations provide much more than a return on that investment. According to [a 2017 report](#) by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, second generation immigrants rank among the top economic

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<sup>1</sup> "Immigrants in the U.S. Economy: Overcoming Hurdles, Yet Still Facing Barriers," Immigration Research Initiative. May 1, 2023. <https://immresearch.org/publications/immigrants-in-the-u-s-economy-overcoming-hurdles-yet-still-facing-barriers/>

<sup>2</sup> "Mapping the Impact," American Immigration Counsel, 2022, <https://data.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/map-the-impact/>

contributors in the United States<sup>3</sup>. And immigrants overall [consume less](#) per capita in public benefits than U.S. citizens.<sup>4</sup>

As economists have [demonstrated](#)<sup>5</sup>, and New York City's Comptroller has [affirmed](#)<sup>6</sup>, investing in immigrant integration yields significant [economic and social benefits](#)<sup>7</sup> over the medium and long-term. In the city home to the largest number of foreign-born residents of any in the country, [data show](#)<sup>8</sup> that immigrants help, not hurt, its broader economy.

For many years, [cities](#)<sup>9</sup> have been enriched or [revitalized](#)<sup>10</sup> by the presence of immigrants and refugees. More recently, Venezuelan migrants have been establishing [new businesses](#)<sup>11</sup>, and expanding their social and economic networks. Indeed, the United States was able to integrate [hundreds of thousands](#)<sup>12</sup> of newly arrived Ukrainians without controversy last year. Working collectively, federal, state, and local governments can build on this tradition, while addressing some long-standing issues that affect all residents. Since immigrants and citizens live together in families and communities, well-designed policies could help all of us prosper.

### **Federal Policies Should be Revised to Facilitate Immigrant Integration**

The removal of restrictive federal laws and policies could greatly support efforts to integrate new arrivals into local communities. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 restricts access to federal programs for many immigrants. The same Congress passed the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, which among other things prohibited asylum seekers from obtaining work permits for six months after filing an asylum application. When

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<sup>3</sup> "The Economic and Fiscal Consequences of Immigration," National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2017. <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/23550/the-economic-and-fiscal-consequences-of-immigration>

<sup>4</sup> Alex Nowrasteh and Michael Howard, "Immigrant and Native Consumption of Means-Tested Welfare and Entitlement Benefits in 2020," CATO Institute, January 21, 2023, <https://www.cato.org/briefing-paper/immigrant-native-consumption-means-tested-welfare-entitlement-benefits-2020>

<sup>5</sup> "The Economic and Fiscal Consequences of Immigration," National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2017. <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/23550/the-economic-and-fiscal-consequences-of-immigration>

<sup>6</sup> "Don't Listen to Eric Adams. Immigrants Make New York City," Brad Lander, The Nation. September 13, 2023. <https://www.thenation.com/article/society/eric-adams-immigration-nyc/>

<sup>7</sup> "As Politicians Cry 'Crisis,' Some Migrants Are Finding Their Way," Christopher Maag and Raúl Vilchis, The New York Times. July 13, 2023. [https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/13/nyregion/migrants-nyc-politics.html?action=click&pgtype=Article&state=default&module=styleIn-ny-migrants&variant=show&region=BELOW\\_MAIN\\_CONTENT&block=storyline\\_flex\\_guide\\_recirc](https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/13/nyregion/migrants-nyc-politics.html?action=click&pgtype=Article&state=default&module=styleIn-ny-migrants&variant=show&region=BELOW_MAIN_CONTENT&block=storyline_flex_guide_recirc)

<sup>8</sup> "New York's Newest Arrivals: Myths and Facts," Make the Road New York. 2023. [https://maketheroadny.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/New-Yorks-Newest-Arrivals\\_-Myths-and-Facts.pdf](https://maketheroadny.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/New-Yorks-Newest-Arrivals_-Myths-and-Facts.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> "Immigrants and the Economy," Fiscal Policy Institute. 2009. [https://fiscalspolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/ImmigrantsIn25MetroAreas\\_20091130.pdf](https://fiscalspolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/ImmigrantsIn25MetroAreas_20091130.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> "Bringing Vitality to Main Street," Americas Society/Council of The Americas and Fiscal Policy Institute. January 2015. <https://fiscalspolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Bringing-Vitality-to-Main-Street.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> "Venezuelan Migrants Could Soon Create New York's First 'Little Caracas'," Winnie Hu and Raúl Vilchis, The New York Times. December 3, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/03/nyregion/venezuelan-migrants-could-soon-create-new-yorks-first-little-caracas.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare>

<sup>12</sup> "The U.S. Took in 271,000 Ukrainian Refugees in a Year. It Can Handle More.," Fiona Harrigan, Reason Foundation. March 9, 2023. <https://reason.com/2023/03/09/the-u-s-took-in-271000-ukrainian-refugees-in-a-year-it-can-handle-more/>

asylum seekers cannot work and are barred from federal assistance, it falls to state and local governments to help them. Congress should abandon decades of failed policies and invest in people who will help build the future of U.S. communities.

To promote the successful integration of new Americans, Congress should pass the LIFT the BAR, (H.R. 4170), HEAL for Immigrant Families, (H.R. 6033), and Asylum Seeker Work Authorization Acts (H.R. 1325). Congress should also appropriate resources that help cities and states provide initial support to new immigrants, by increasing funding for the Shelter and Services Program and programs that provide longer term investments in arrivals. By allowing asylum seekers to participate fully in the workforce, and opening access to health care, nutrition, and other services that allow families to gain stability, cities and states will be able to welcome and integrate them more effectively.

### **Access to Employment Authorization Helps Immigrants and Communities**

The significant delays in processing work authorization applications and renewals for eligible non-citizens places immigrants in limbo and limits their ability to provide for their families and integrate into their communities. Although the Administration has taken [some steps](#)<sup>13</sup> to address these barriers, many immigrants continue to face delays in securing or renewing their authorization to work. According to the [Asylum Seekers Advocacy Project](#), in November, 2023, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) was taking more than one year to process many work permit renewal applications.<sup>14</sup>

Access to work authorization boosts wages and related tax contributions, allows immigrants to work in professions that better match their skills and training, and makes it easier for them to start businesses and employ others. The Immigration Research Initiative [found](#) that immigrants with employment authorization documents make \$3,200 more annually than people without work permits—money that is reinvested in their community.<sup>15</sup>

Granting timely access to work permits will help address labor shortages in local economies. State and city officials, including the [governors of Indiana and Utah](#)<sup>16</sup>; the mayors of [Denver](#)<sup>17</sup>, [New York](#)<sup>18</sup>, [Erie](#),

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<sup>13</sup> "Fact Sheet: The Biden-Harris Administration Takes New Actions to Increase Border Enforcement and Accelerate Processing for Work Authorizations, While Continuing to Call on Congress to Act," Department of Homeland Security. September 20, 2023. <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2023/09/20/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-takes-new-actions-increase-border>

<sup>14</sup> "Work Permits", Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project. <https://help.asylumadvocacy.org/work-permits/#top>

<sup>15</sup> "'Let Us Work': The Wage Gain When Asylum Seekers Gain Work Authorization," Immigration Research Initiative. September 7, 2023. [immresearch.org/publications/let-us-work-the-wage-gain-when-asylum-seekers-gain-work-authorization/](https://immresearch.org/publications/let-us-work-the-wage-gain-when-asylum-seekers-gain-work-authorization/)

<sup>16</sup> "To solve our national immigration crisis, let states sponsor immigrants," Eric Holcomb and Spencer Cox. February 21, 2023. [washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/02/21/eric-holcomb-spencer-cox-states-immigration/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/02/21/eric-holcomb-spencer-cox-states-immigration/)

<sup>17</sup> "Denver Mayor Mike Johnston speaks 1-on-1 about migrant response, housing and public safety," Gabriela Vidal. November 4, 2023. [cbsnews.com/colorado/news/denvers-mayor-mike-johnston-speaks-migrant-response-housing-public-safety/](https://www.cbsnews.com/colorado/news/denvers-mayor-mike-johnston-speaks-migrant-response-housing-public-safety/)

<sup>18</sup> "NYC Mayor Eric Adams pushes feds to help migrants get work permits," Ivan Pereira. August 31, 2023. [abcnews.go.com/US/nyc-mayor-eric-adams-pushes-feds-migrants-work/story?id=102828515](https://abcnews.go.com/US/nyc-mayor-eric-adams-pushes-feds-migrants-work/story?id=102828515)

[Pennsylvania](#)<sup>19</sup> and other cities; and businesses such as the [agriculture and hospitality industries](#)<sup>20</sup> in Illinois, have called for more immigrants to address workforce needs and to enrich their communities in multiple ways. Ultimately Congress must pass immigration reform to provide a pathway to citizenship for all immigrants residing in and contributing to the country as well as expand pathways for entry.

### **State and Local Governments Are Taking Innovative Steps to Welcome New Americans**

Through our relationships with advocates, service providers, and officials, NILC has [documented](#) state and local government policies on social services for immigrants<sup>21</sup>. The Women's Refugee Commission also released a recent [report](#) detailing the measures that several cities have taken to welcome new immigrants.<sup>22</sup>

We have found that, in recent years, many states and localities have reinforced their commitment to immigrants and, with the support of community groups, welcomed them, invested in their resettlement, and advocated for more federal and philanthropic resources to aid them. Some localities have matched government and private funds to help new arrivals. In collaboration with community-based organizations, they are exploring ambitious strategies, including intake or navigation centers, short-term and longer-term housing options, workforce development, assistance in securing work permits, legal services, and transportation to places where there are economic opportunities, family or community support. Government officials have consulted with architects, housing advocates, and immigrant rights groups to examine cost-effective alternatives to shelters. Recommendations include an expansion of housing vouchers, which could free up space in shelters for new arrivals, and modular housing, which could improve access to more permanent affordable housing.

States also have taken steps to help ensure that new arrivals have access to job training and economic opportunities. Minnesota's new Office of New Americans will promote economic mobility, enhance civic participation, and facilitate integration into receiving communities. The state also established workforce development grants to help targeted populations. New York's Office for New Americans will provide job training and placement, legal, and other essential services to immigrants. North Dakota's Office of Legal Immigration will support businesses in recruiting and retaining foreign labor, contract with communities and agencies to develop immigrant integration plans, and offer access to basic needs that promote participation in the workforce. Vermont will disburse employment grants to new Americans and other low-income immigrants who intend to become state residents. Washington dedicated funds to employment services and workforce programs for newly arriving refugees and immigrants. And California is distributing grants to local governments to support immigrant entrepreneurs, help families

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<sup>19</sup> "Mayor Schember Discusses Welcoming Documented Migrants to Erie," Elspeth Mizner. January 3, 2024. [erinenewsnow.com/story/50298142/mayor-schember-discusses-welcoming-documented-migrants-to-erie](https://erinenewsnow.com/story/50298142/mayor-schember-discusses-welcoming-documented-migrants-to-erie)

<sup>20</sup> "Illinois farmers join calls for migrant work authorization," Monica Eng. Axios Chicago. [axios.com/local/chicago/2023/08/10/migrant-work-permits-illinois-farms](https://axios.com/local/chicago/2023/08/10/migrant-work-permits-illinois-farms)

<sup>21</sup> "A Decade of State Immigrant Rights Victories: Moving Toward Health Care and Economic Justice for All," National Immigration Law Center. December 2022. <https://www.nilc.org/news/special-reports/a-decade-of-state-immigrant-rights-victories-moving-toward-health-care-and-economic-justice-for-all/>

<sup>22</sup> "Opportunities for Welcome: Lessons Learned for Supporting People Seeking Asylum in Chicago, Denver, New York City, and Portland, Maine," Women's Refugee Commission. November 30, 2023. [womensrefugeecommission.org/research-resources/opportunities-for-welcome-lessons-learned-for-supporting-people-seeking-asylum-in-chicago-denver-new-york-city-and-portland-maine/](https://womensrefugeecommission.org/research-resources/opportunities-for-welcome-lessons-learned-for-supporting-people-seeking-asylum-in-chicago-denver-new-york-city-and-portland-maine/)

navigate social services, and implement culturally appropriate policies and practices. These welcoming programs speak to the extent to which states and cities see new immigrants as a positive force for their economies and communities.

Beyond these investments, state and local officials have underscored the need for a more coordinated national approach to resettling and integrating new immigrants. Advocates have made a number of recommendations in addition to those mentioned in this testimony, such as expanding Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and prioritizing USCIS resources.<sup>23</sup> Although these cities and states are showing incredible leadership in creating welcoming and supportive communities, the federal government is ultimately responsible for immigration policy and must take responsibility for ensuring that local communities are well-situated to welcome newcomers.

### **Conclusion**

Immigrants help towns, cities, states, and the country as a whole, and when they have stable housing, food and access to health care, they can do so much more effectively. The country's commitment to humanitarian immigration is one of its strengths. It is built on the values that we can simultaneously embody the promise on the Statue of Liberty to take "your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free," while growing the economy and strengthening our communities. To reach its promise, the country can find inspiration in the cities and states that, with innovation and investments, have welcomed new Americans with open arms.

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<sup>23</sup> "Responding to the Increase of Asylum Seekers and Vulnerable Migrants in New York City & U.S. Cities," FWD.us, September 8, 2023, <https://www.fwd.us/news/responding-to-the-increase-of-asylum-seekers-and-vulnerable-migrants-in-new-york-city-u-s-cities/#posts>