2025 FEDERAL POLICY SERIES Immigration





HARTING BROTHING DUCTOR STREET, MARKENER,

2025 FEDERAL POLICY SERIES INTRODUCTION

The 119th Congress and the new Administration have triggered dynamic and often forceful debates on the direction of national policy. From economic opportunity to immigration to health care, these debates are poised to trigger drastic reorganizations of American life in ways that are likely to influence Latino communities in particular. At a time when Latino issues are front and center, Hispanic Federation's summer policy series provides an opportunity for decision-makers across the federal landscape to hear directly from the Latino community regarding their values and policy priorities. The 2025 Federal Policy Series will focus on nine issues important to Latinos across the United States, with standalone chapters published throughout the summer, each addressing a specific challenge faced by the Latino community.

As the nation's premier Latino nonprofit membership organization, Hispanic Federation works directly with its network of 850 organizations across 43 states and territories, including Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia and the US Virgin Islands; the policy proposals outlined in this series are reflective of this depth of community experience.

Hispanic Federation's greatest strength lies in its deep roots in Latino communities and relationships with grassroots leaders, nonprofits, public officials, policymakers, media, small business owners, and private sector leaders. Our policy and advocacy work aims to advance Latino opportunity and equity by focusing on three pillars: Civil Rights, Justice, Equity, and Empowerment. Our methodology in driving policy change is to work with community on the ground to identify inequities and develop solutions. Latinos are a dynamic and diverse population that is actively reshaping the course of this nation. Latinos/Latinas/Latines/Latinx can be Black, White, Indigenous, Asian, Arab and/or Mestizo, among other ethnicities. As such, the recommendations embedded within our summer policy series are wide-ranging, covering everything from civil rights to housing, and outline proposals grounded in research and experience to support communities from rural farm workers to urban businessowners and everyone in between.



hispanic federation

2025 FEDERAL POLICY SERIES: Immigration

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand; A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame; Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name; Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand; Glows world-wide welcome" – "The New Colossus", Emma Lazarus.¹

Discourse on immigration has moved away from a humanitarian, immigrant-focused approach toward one emphasizing punitive enforcement, rather than a pathway to documentation for the millions of immigrants who are part of the fabric of our economy and society. HF believes in working on incremental, long-term solutions that address the ongoing reality of migration from Latin America, instead of problematic deportations, detentions, and punitive border security. Hispanic Federation has been at the forefront of the fight for immigration reform, working with state and

federal legislators, business leaders, and faith- and community-based organizations to explain the urgent need for and benefits of fixing a system that currently serves neither immigrants nor the nation. Our early efforts focused on local advocacy and collaborations with our member agencies to develop citizenship campaigns. Today, Hispanic Federation has expanded its focus to become a national provider of immigrant integration and essential direct services as well as a national advocate for immigration policy that ensures justice, equity, and economic stability. The successes of these programs inform our policy agenda, including:

HF BELIEVES IN WORKING ON INCREMENTAL, LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS THAT ADDRESS THE ONGOING REALITY OF MIGRATION FROM LATIN AMERICA, INSTEAD OF PROBLEMATIC DEPORTATIONS, DETENTIONS, AND PUNITIVE BORDER SECURITY.

- Creating a pathway to citizenship for immigrants who have long called this country home, including DREAMERs.
- Expediting work authorization for newly arrived migrants, including asylum seekers, who wait in limbo for months before they are able to properly provide for themselves and their families.
- Expanding access to public services and programs to boost culturally relevant and linguistically competent information about available opportunities and how they can be better tailored to improve their efficacy for the communities they serve.
- Increasing funding for the nonprofit organizations that are on the frontlines of serving immigrant communities across the country.

SITUATION REPORT

The U.S. immigration system is broken and has been for decades. Immigrants comprise approximately 14% of the US population; nearly 50m Americans were born outside the US.² There are an estimated 8 to 16 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S. who are productive, tax-paying individuals,

have developed roots in U.S. communities, and who are raising families with children — many of whom are American citizens. But the current political climate, antiimmigrant policies, and rhetoric has increased the fear of deportation within these communities, pushing them further into the shadows. Only Congress can fix the problem, but partisan politics regularly gets in the way of workable and humane solutions that keep immigrant families together, provide pathways to regularize immigration status, and help U.S. communities prosper.

The last broad spectrum immigration reform bill that offered regularization for undocumented immigrants was signed into law under President Reagan in 1986, THERE ARE AN ESTIMATED 8 TO 16 MILLION UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS IN THE U.S. WHO ARE PRODUCTIVE, TAX-PAYING INDIVIDUALS, HAVE DEVELOPED ROOTS IN U.S. COMMUNITIES, AND WHO ARE RAISING FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN – MANY OF WHOM ARE AMERICAN CITIZENS.

with an estimated three million individuals eventually benefitting from the program.³ Since 1986, legislative progress on immigration reform has ground to a halt. The IIRIRA, signed by President Clinton as part of 1997's omnibus legislation, implemented a number of anti-immigrant statutes that have undermined Constitutional protections while rendering the entire immigration system more cumbersome for both prospective immigrants and federal administrators. Then, in 2010, a version of the DREAM Act narrowly failed to pass the Senate, despite bipartisan support and closely-tailored requirements.⁴ A sweeping reform package proposed in 2013 went nowhere. ⁵ Over subsequent years, increasingly hostile public discourse focusing on restricting immigration has prevented Congress from attempting broad-based reform. In the last few years, immigration policies and practices have taken a drastic turn for the worse with the implementation of many harsh policies, such as SB 1070, 'Secure Communities,' travel bans and E-Verify. The caging and deportation of migrant children without their parents in 2019-20 only added to fears of an increasing xenophobia against immigrants.

Expansion of hostile rhetoric and discriminatory enforcement has increased the urgency of protecting immigrants. In response, advocates in 2021 had hoped to provide a path to citizenship to several key groups: DREAMers, people with Temporary Protected Status, farmworkers, and other essential workers. Yet the attempted passage of broad immigration reform in September 2021 through reconciliation was unsuccessful. Still more recently, in 2024, the Senate introduced a bipartisan border security bill to address the rise in asylum claims while augmenting security along the US-MX border. However, bipartisan consensus around the bill collapsed in the face of election year politicking, causing the bill to stall. Instead, the first major piece of immigration legislation that Congress passed in years was 2025's Laken Riley Act. Far from addressing systemic challenges in America's immigration system, this legislation effectively tramples on Constitutional rights to due process in order to accelerate criminalization of immigrants. This legislation highlights the stark choice facing US immigration policy between incrimination and incorporation. And now a new Administration seems bent on pursuing a quixotic and self-destructive agenda of mass deportation that is set to devastate our economy and communities.

ASKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Entry Programs

• **Restore asylum access:** Asylum is a statutory right by US and international law. While the CBP-One app was riddled with counterintuitive challenges, its removal closed the primary avenue for proactive asylum. First and foremost, a pathway to humane asylum must be reinstated, whether via an app or other means. In the event that an app is reinstated, it must be reformed to reduce geographical limitations of appointments and mitigate the unpredictable lottery nature of those appointments to ensure that it does not become an unintentional



avenue to the creation of 'remain-in-Mexico'-style policies.⁶ Simultaneously, USCIS must re-implement some form of analogue asylum processing for those outside the US to support those fleeing persecution who lack access to and familiarity with modern mobile design. **Hispanic Federation demands a just and accessible system for all asylum seekers.**

- Family Immigration Backlog: The passage of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1952⁷ laid the foundation for the current immigration preferencing system, including the ability for US citizens and lawful permanent residents to facilitate the immigration of their close family members.⁸ However, inadequate funding for both staffing and vital infrastructure upgrades has left USCIS unable to satisfy the promise of familial immigration embedded within the INA. As a result, many close family members, including children of US citizens, face a backlog of applications stretching into the millions.⁹ To address this backlog, Hispanic Federation demands that Congress increase funding for USCIS with specific requirements that that funding be used to ameliorate the family immigration backlog. Likewise, we demand Congress explore and implement proposals to enable the recapture of visas to support the reunification of families along terms already provided for by US law.
- H-2A/B Visas
 - Protections: H2-A and B visa workers are essential to vital sectors of our economy, ranging from agriculture to construction to supply-chain logistics. These visa workers are nominally protected by an array of Department of Labor statutes covered by OSHA, Employment and Training, the Employment Standards Administration and others. However, recent lawsuits and journalistic work have demonstrated that existing protections for migrant workers are seldom enforced and often met with illegal retaliation.¹⁰ Hispanic Federation demands the expansion of inspection and enforcement efforts for legally mandated protections for H-2A/B visa holders, including migrant housing.
 - Expansion of access: To address the growing need for specialized labor, HF calls for the expansion of H-2A and B visa caps, as well as alterations in formula and visa determinations to allow employers to alter visa allocations in closer proximity to visa procural so that employers can feel confident that they will be able to balance their requests with changing business needs. While reactive legal response efforts can help plug the gap, only proactive federal enforcement coupled with positive incentives for employers can simultaneously protect workers and connect them with the labor markets most in need of their talents. Likewise, HF urges Congress to explore possibilities to allow visa workers

to change jobs while retaining their current visas to further support flexibility in the U.S. labor supply.¹¹ Hispanic Federation demands an expanded visa system that prioritizes worker rights and flexibility for evolving workforce demands.

• Employment Authorization Expansion: The United States needs immigrant workers to perform crucial jobs from home health to home construction, and immigrants need access to employment authorization to secure the right to dignified, legal, sustainable employment. In the summer of 2024, nearly 1,000,000 affirmative asylum cases were pending in excess of statutory maximum waiting periods.¹² Meanwhile, almost 1.5m employment authorization documents (EAD's, aka, work permits) awaited processing.¹³ leaving an expansive workforce idle. These rampant delays ensure that even existing pathways within the immigration system are not able to operate as intended. Hispanic Federation demands the expansion and expediting of work authorizations through increased funding to address administrative backlogs and statutory expansions of the population eligible for EADs.

STATUS AND DOCUMENTATION

- DACA: The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), policy has enjoyed broad public support for years.¹⁴ There are approximately 500,000 DACA recipients, and according to the White House, over 300,000 DACA recipients work in essential positions, including classrooms, healthcare workers, and food supply.¹⁵ Nonetheless, DACA recipients remain haunted by the specter of uncertainty, as an entangled complex of federal regulations, judicial rulings, and legislative nods all combine to create a kaleidoscopic policy landscape. Hispanic Federation demands the passage of legislation in keeping with the principles and structure of the DREAM Act.
- TPS: Likewise, for years, Temporary Protected Status (TPS) has given refugees safe harbor in the United States from turbulence in their home countries at the discretion of the Department of Homeland Security.¹⁶ The Congressional Research Service (CRS) estimated the 2024 TPS population at over 850,000 individuals from states ranging from Nepal to Venezuela, though that number predated the recent revocation of TPS from hundreds of thousands.¹⁷ A 2019 estimate held that TPS recipients paid almost \$5bn in taxes, a number that has certainly increased as the number of recipients has expanded.¹⁸ The program is not only morally righteous in shielding those facing the alternative of deportation to dangerous conditions, but also economically beneficial to the United States. Now, however, TPS designations across the country are under threat. Hispanic Federation demands consistent designation within the TPS program as well as pathways to citizenship for both groups via terms akin to those included in the American Dream and Promise Act.
- Stop Mass Deportations: The Trump administration has proven itself fiercely committed to an inhumane and self-destructive policy of mass detention and deportation. Longstanding protections like TPS have been revoked, and the administration is prioritizing high profile, mass raids over targeted enforcement to advance public safety. Executive orders have called for deportation on ideological grounds¹⁹ and even a fast track to the death penalty for immigrants.²⁰ These measures are pointlessly cruel and ultimately undermine the national interest. Moreover, the reckless and noxious expansion of immigration enforcement has rapidly ensnared all classes of immigrants from new arrivals to long-term DACA recipients to lawful permanent residents (LPR's) on the very cusp of obtaining citizenship. In some cases, even those who are already US citizens have been entangled in an increasingly indiscriminate mass deportation agenda. This expanding dragnet is inflicting deleterious terror on American communities and tearing mixed status families apart. Hispanic Federation demands mass deportations be halted immediately and due process be restored to the US deportation system.

- Driver's licenses: Nineteen states plus the District of Columbia permit undocumented immigrants to access driver's licenses in some form or fashion. These states, ranging from Utah to Hawaii have acted out of a combined recognition that mobility is a prerequisite for equitable public safety and effective engagement in local economies, particularly as roughly three-fourths of the US population lack access to a typical job by public transit within a go-minute trip.²¹ Hispanic Federation demands national legislation regarding access to and reciprocity of driver's licenses for all residents, regardless of status.
 - **REAL ID Act Implementation:** Long-delayed, the implementation of the REAL ID Act has arrived, bringing with it chaos and uncertainty for immigrant travelers.²² The fears and delays caused by the Act's provisions are enough of an imposition on immigrants and citizens who are able to provide the documentation required by the act to warrant skepticism. However, REAL ID's provisions effectively bar undocumented individuals from air travel without possession of an international passport. Coupled with recent actions by the executive branch including the implementation of an alien registration requirement, and the apprehension, detention, and removal of non-criminal undocumented immigrants undocumented immigrants risk exposure at airports if traveling with a foreign passport. In turn, its provisions are not only cumbersome but questionably Constitutional in light of SCOTUS verified right to freedom of movement regardless of immigration status.²³ Hispanic Federation demands that the TSA submit new regulations providing for alternative modes of travel verification to safeguard the rights to travel and privacy for all Americans, irrespective of immigration status.

Welfare

- Sanctuary Policies: Sanctuary policies have proven effective at bolstering public health, safety, and economic outcomes in implementing jurisdictions because these policies enable immigrant communities to live and work without fear of removal. Likewise, these policies free local law enforcement to uphold state and local statutes without the complication and costs of undertaking federal enforcement obligations. Hispanic Federation demands lawmakers oppose any bills or policies which seek to interfere with state and local sanctuary policies, including those advancing an ill-advised and questionably unconstitutional sidestepping of tenth amendment rights.
- Healthcare obligations for migrants: Immigrants especially Latinos suffer from a greater incidence of negative health outcomes and lower standards of care than do native born Americans.²⁴ We were heartened by the recent federal expansion of access to the ACA marketplace for DACA recipients, and encourage Congress to pass legislation reversing its sudden revocation, thereby codifying that right of access. Expanding access to healthcare for immigrant populations is not only the ethical decision, but will also ensure that the U.S.'s fastest growing workforce will remain healthy and on the job. Hispanic Federation demands the expansion of healthcare access to immigrant populations.
- Social program access: Despite years of effective work to improve the gap, the poverty rate in the U.S. immigrant community remains 15% higher than among non-immigrants.²⁵ Simultaneously, mixed-status families remain almost 40% more likely to experience poverty than native-born residents.²⁶ Immigrant communities in turn are more vulnerable not only to poverty, but also to concomitant food insecurity.²⁷ However, despite paying billions annually in taxes, immigrants remain ineligible for most social programs. Hispanic Federation demands the expansion of social services like counseling, healthcare, student aid, and disaster aid to all, irrespective of citizenship status, in recognition of the essential role immigrants play in local economies as workers, taxpayers, and community members.

DATA SUPPORTING ASKS

Entry Programs

- 80 percent of Americans live in counties that lost population over the past decade; local officials will increasingly feel the pinch of dwindling workforces. Shrinking tax bases have made it harder for government budgets to support essential services, such as infrastructure and public schools.
- Similarly, rural demographic analysis shows that while rural counties have faced a natural population decrease of over 100,000 since the pandemic, immigration offsets those decreases. Without immigration, over 50% of rural America would instead have faced population declines.²⁸
- The U.S. economy, particularly in rural areas, simply will not be able to thrive without the critical immigrant labor force.
 - Likewise, the economic contribution of immigrants, who pay taxes, including Social Security payroll taxes without eligibility for federal entitlements, is helping ensure current and future retirees are receiving their full benefits.
- Across several categories, the family immigration backlog extends over a decade.²⁹
- Undocumented immigrants paid nearly \$100 billion in taxes in 2022, while being barred from receiving social benefit from many of the programs they were supporting.³⁰
- Anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination has been increasing across the world, fueling a growing epidemic
 of displaced people. In turn, many seek the relative stability and support of the United States,
 though journalistic reporting affirms that many have struggled to access asylum,³¹ even
 during periods in which facilitating asylum for those fleeing anti-LGBTQ persecution was an
 administration priority.³²
- As of 2021, there were over 1.2m LGBTQ+ immigrants in the United States, according to research from UCLA's Williams Institute. Of these, approximately 50% were Latine.³³
 - Furthermore, over 100,000 same-sex couples in the US were estimated to include at least one immigrant partner, 18,000 of whom had at least one child.³⁴

Status and Documentation

- Hispanic Federation was proud to support over 200 family applicants to the Keeping Families Together program during its short tenure.³⁵ This program sensibly allowed undocumented children and spouses without criminal histories who had been consistently present in the United States for 10+ years to apply to adjust their status while remaining with their families.
- Hispanic Federation has aided thousands of TPS-recipients with legal navigation and service access, informing our recommendation for TPS holders.
- Deportations deprive children of care and contribute to developmental delays.³⁶
- Unsurprisingly, one study has found that increasing the frequency of immigration enforcement in an area decreases housing stability among Latino households.³⁷
- While the current Administration has defended mass deportation as crime reduction, multiapproach metanalyses like those conducted by Ousey and Kubrin (2018) have shown there to either be no causal or even a negative correlation between immigration and crime, suggesting that mass deportation policies are if anything only likely to *increase* local crime.³⁸
- Research suggests that programs expanding immigrants' access to the traditional labor market are not only beneficial for local economies, but also reduce local crime rates.³⁹

• Since 2021, HF programs have invested \$15m in immigrant welcome and legal services, supporting community investment and integration. Hispanic Federation's culturally competent, linguistically relevant Know Your Rights materials have reached over 6m people, ensuring that Americans — new and established — are appropriately apprised of our hardwon Constitutional rights.

Welfare

- Research shows that healthcare access is harshly proscribed for migrants, with the greatest limitations occurring post-immigration.⁴⁰
- Hispanic Federation's own work with visa-holding farm and food workers in North Carolina confirms that individuals are often forced into illegal inadequate housing, marked by moldy sheets, cramped quarters, and dangerous pathogen exposure, aligning with prior research on dangerous, unhealthy conditions facing such workers.⁴¹
- Compliance with anti-Sanctuary city laws can take resources away from local law enforcement and other public safety institutions. Indeed, in 2017 the Fraternal Order of Police sent a letter to Congressional leadership stating their opposition to any bill that could see federal funds for local police departments rescinded for failing to comply with immigration law.⁴² Similarly, many counties across the political spectrum have sanctuary policies to preserve limited policing resources.⁴³
 - Likewise, in May 2025, the National Sheriff's Association opposed the unilateral, punitive designation by DHS of 'sanctuary jurisdictions' as "violat[ing] the core principles of trust, cooperation, and partnership with fellow law enforcement," while critiquing the absence of a "legitimate [law enforcement] reason."⁴⁴
- Meta studies have suggested that sanctuary policies either have zero relationship on crime rate, or perhaps have a negative relation — that is, sanctuary policies may reduce crime rates.⁴⁵
- One study has suggested that individual Latina expectant mothers seek prenatal care later and with weaker healthcare outcomes in non-sanctuary jurisdictions.⁴⁶
 - Another study comparing birth outcomes across North Carolina jurisdictions found a connection between immigration policies and birth weight, finding that the implementation of a Sec. 287(g) agreement was correlated with a decrease in birth weight of newborns to foreign-born, lower education parents and increased "small-for-gestational-age" birth percentages by 2.29%.⁴⁷
- One study from 2019 found that implementing Sec. 287(g) agreements contributed to a 10% decline in Latino student enrollment in public schools,⁴⁸ while another found that the programs lead to an increase in chronic absenteeism, thereby reducing engagement, even among students who remain enrolled.⁴⁹
- Recent efforts to close health care access, coverage, and affordability gaps among immigrant communities, including New York's excluded workers fund and Hispanic Federation's programmatic work connecting immigrant communities to healthcare and counseling services in states like New York, Florida, and Connecticut, have all increased effective medical treatments among underserved communities.⁵⁰

CONCLUSION

America's success in the 21st century hinges upon our ability to implement immigration policies that prioritize family unification, access to visas and documentation, and the creation of economic opportunities. Our nation's infrastructure relies upon immigrant labor; our farm and food sectors are powered by migrant workers; our classrooms and campuses are home to innovative immigrant perspectives, and our communities are built on relationships between Americans old and new. For decades, a stagnant, haphazard, and punitive immigration system has undermined American economies, communities, and families. It is imperative that Congress take steps to modernize the American immigration system, restoring stability, and humanity to American immigration policy.

Immigrant communities are far from a monolith, and solutions to American immigration challenges require multifaceted, disaggregated solutions. Entry programs, including for asylum and migrant labor, must be preserved, codified, and expanded to ensure that American labor and statutory requirements are met. Likewise, it is beyond time that pathways to documentation and naturalization be augmented to ensure that millions of Americans who have built lives in this country for years and even decades can enjoy the same security and opportunities as any other American. Finally, the American social safety net must be improved to better support the needs of immigrants old and new, both through expansion of eligibility and access. These measures may be challenging, but are eminently achievable, and doing so would facilitate another century of American prosperity.

Learn more about Hispanic Federation's policy priorities by scanning the QR code at right.



Endnotes

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