



CWS Statement to the Senate Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Immigration & Citizenship, pertaining to its [hearing](#) entitled "The Essential Role of Immigrant Workers in America" on Wednesday, May 12, 2021

As a 75-year old humanitarian organization representing 37 Protestant, Anglican, and Orthodox communions and 24 refugee resettlement offices across 17 states, Church World Service (CWS) urges the Subcommittee to affirm the value and dignity of immigrants and refugees as essential workers and affirm the need for a compassionate and humane immigration system that is inclusive of all immigrant neighbors by supporting pathways to citizenship for the 11 million undocumented immigrants, ending reliance on detention and deportation, prioritizing family unity, and honoring the dignity of all people.

Immigrants and refugees are part of our national fabric and vital to the prosperity of our communities. They are valued members of our families, congregations, and communities. Immigrants and refugees are mothers, fathers, and children. Immigrants help drive our economy, including undocumented immigrants and individuals with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), Temporary Protected Status (TPS), and Deferred Enforced Departure (DED). They are [doctors, nurses, and medical aides](#) working in our hospitals and elder care facilities, caring for and treating COVID-19 patients. They are [farm workers](#) who put food on our tables and truck drivers and grocery store workers making sure our grocery stores stay stocked. They are factory workers making sure Americans have what we need to stay healthy and beat the pandemic. Essential workers have faced the most significant risks amid the COVID-19 pandemic. As the world searches for solutions during a global pandemic, we have a moral obligation to those who are our neighbors and community members.

For far too long, Dreamers, farm workers, TPS holders and many more immigrant workers have waited for Congress to deliver an opportunity to pass a meaningful, permanent solution that provides a path to citizenship. CWS joins nearly [1,000 faith organizations, faith leaders, and people of faith](#) urging the Biden administration to include a pathway to citizenship for essential immigrant workers, farmworkers, people with DACA, TPS, and DED, and their families in the upcoming recovery packages prioritized through reconciliation -- and urges Members of Congress to weigh in with administration to do the same. Our leaders can meet this urgent moment to re-energize our economy, go big to build the cities and towns of the future, and modernize our immigration system to show the world that America can lead with bold ideas and our most cherished values.

Refugee and immigrant essential workers keep our communities healthy and strong during the COVID-19 pandemic and are vital to our nation's recovery from this crisis. In the U.S., an estimated [176,000 refugees](#) are health care workers and [175,000](#) work in food supply chains. [Six million immigrant workers](#) in our communities are at the frontlines of keeping us healthy and fed. While making up only [17%](#) of about 156 million working people, immigrants are disproportionately represented in front line occupations and essential industries including healthcare, food service, child care, cleaning service, manufacturing, and many more. However, refugees in particular have been [largely left out](#) of COVID-19 relief packages. Our national response to the pandemic has shamefully failed to include and guarantee immigrants' inclusive and full access to economic relief, as well as equitable access to testing, treatment, and vaccination. We lament the disproportionate impact of the virus on communities of color, including Black immigrants and immigrants of color.

CWS urges the Biden administration and Congress to secure a pathway to citizenship for the 11 million undocumented immigrants, including essential workers, immediately. As Congress considers legislative solutions that would provide pathways to citizenship for our undocumented neighbors, CWS urges our national leaders to support immigration policies that do not immorally exclude certain neighbors from relief because of our nation's inequitable and racist criminal justice system that disproportionately targets Black and Brown communities. We [applaud](#) the House for passing the *Dream and Promise Act*, and we urge the Senate to swiftly improve and pass the following bills that would provide pathways to citizenship for our undocumented neighbors: the *U.S. Citizenship Act* ([S.348](#)), *Citizenship for Essential Workers Act* ([S.747](#)), *Dream Act* ([S.264](#)), and *SECURE Act* ([S.306](#)). We note the House-passed *Farm Workforce Modernization Act* ([H.R.1603](#)).

As the U.S. recovers and rebuilds, the need to value and honor immigrants and refugees is increasingly urgent. Crises test who we are as a nation – and we are stronger when we are united, extend compassion to our neighbors, and listen to public health experts. The administration and Congress must continue to repair the harm caused by our current system and envision a humane system for all people to build safe and healthy lives.