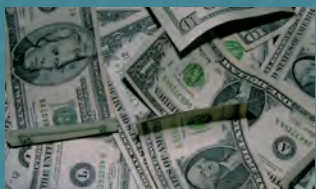


# SOCIETY & IMMIGRATION

## The Truth Behind the Immigration Debate in North Carolina

### IMMIGRANTS & THE ECONOMY



Undocumented workers contribute more to the economy (in the form of taxes, economic growth provided by undocumented labor, and consumer spending) than they receive in benefits from various governments.<sup>1</sup>

All undocumented workers pay sales taxes and property taxes (through rent or home ownership), and many also pay social security and income taxes.<sup>2</sup>

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Immigrants tend to complement the native workforce, rather than compete with it.<sup>3</sup>

Studies show that legalization would likely improve wages for all workers.<sup>4</sup>

Immigrants contribute to the Social Security system.

- Studies show that undocumented immigrants provide a net gain of \$7 billion to the Social Security system each year.<sup>5</sup>
- Undocumented immigrants cannot receive any Social Security benefits.

How has the economic downturn impacted immigrants?

- Non-citizen immigrants are much more vulnerable to fluctuations in the economy. The median annual income of non-citizen immigrant households fell 7.3 percent from 2006-2007. In contrast the median annual income of all U.S. households increased 1.3 percent during the same period.<sup>6</sup>

### IMMIGRANTS & LEGAL STATUS<sup>7</sup>

Over the last 50 years, immigration laws have become increasingly strict. In the past, many waves of immigrants passed relatively freely through ports of entry such as Ellis Island. Since the U.S. has tightened its borders, most of these same families would be turned away today.

Undocumented immigrants are not all criminals just because of their immigration status. While entering this country illegally may be a crime, coming to the country legally and then overstaying a visa is a regulatory, or civil, violation, but is not a crime.

Under the current system, people typically enter the US legally based on family relationships and employment relationships.

- The family-based system requires a sponsor (either a US citizen or permanent resident). These cases all result in a green card (legal permanent residency).
- The beneficiary must be within the “nuclear family” of the sponsor, so aunts and uncles, nephews and nieces are not eligible.

Usually, the family-based system entails very long waiting periods – up to 20 years in some cases – because of a very strict quota system.

There are no temporary visas for “unskilled,” “essential” workers who fill year-round jobs.

Under our current system, for the vast majority of workers, there is no “line” to stand in to enter the U.S. legally.



*While the immigration debate continues across the state, immigrants are facing increased discrimination. We need to fix this broken system through comprehensive immigration reform.*



## LANGUAGE ABOUT IMMIGRANTS<sup>8</sup>

In the public sphere there are numerous terms used to describe immigrants, but it is important to think about the negative connotation these terms carry.

- The terms “illegal” and “illegal immigrant” automatically criminalize the person, instead of the action they are purported to have committed. Shortening the term in this way also stereotypes undocumented people who are in the United States as having committed a crime.
- An estimated 40 percent of all undocumented people living in the U.S. entered the country legally and then overstayed their visas.
- It is degrading to use the terms “alien” and “illegal alien,” which describe undocumented immigrants as inhuman outsiders who come to the U.S. with questionable motivations.

## LOCAL ENFORCEMENT OF IMMIGRATION LAWS<sup>9</sup>

Immigrant communities throughout North Carolina are living increasingly in a state of fear and insecurity due to programs in which local law enforcement agencies are actively enforcing federal immigration laws. These programs have led to the deportation of thousands of undocumented immigrants statewide, often separating hardworking parents from their children. The Major Cities Chiefs – a national organization of police chiefs – note that “Immigration enforcement by local police would likely negatively effect and undermine the level of trust and cooperation between local police and immigrant communities.”<sup>10</sup>



## COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM

### What reforms are needed?

#### PROVIDE A PATH TO CITIZENSHIP

- Workers currently living in the U.S. should have the opportunity to adjust their status so that they can achieve permanent residence and citizenship.

#### PROTECT WORKERS

- The nation needs a worker visa program that adequately protects the wages and working conditions of U.S. and immigrant workers and provides a path to permanent status.

#### REUNITE FAMILIES

- Families wanting to reunite should have their admission expedited, and those admitted on work visas should be able to keep their nuclear families intact.

#### RESTORE THE RULE OF LAW & ENHANCE SECURITY

- Enforcement only works when the law is realistic and enforceable.

