

Bridging America

A STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM FROM CHICAGO STAKEHOLDERS

We are a nation of immigrants that shaped and created this great country. Yet, at the start of the 21st century, our current immigration system is in disarray, failing to adapt to the needs, complexities and opportunities of our global economy. Cities and states are unprepared and ill-equipped for the demographic, social and economic challenges that today's patterns of immigration create.

America's complex and backlogged immigration system keeps immigrants and foreign workers from obtaining the legal status to work and live in this country, limits the capacity of our workforce to be more competitive internationally, and tears families apart. At the same time, millions of undocumented immigrants live in the shadows, hindered in their ability to contribute to their communities, further their education, open bank accounts or obtain drivers' licenses. Many do not report crimes or call upon law enforcement because of the fear of deportation.

This is not a matter simply of partisan perspective. Leaders on both sides of the political aisle, regardless of their ideology, acknowledge that our immigration system simply does not work.

The voices of thoughtful, moderate leaders who represent affected businesses, professions, unions, religious communities, and public institutions such as education, healthcare and law enforcement, are often not heard in this debate because rational discussions are frequently drowned out by harsh and misinformed anti-immigrant rhetoric. For this reason, in cities across the country, AJC convened, with support from the Ford Foundation, the Bridging America Task Forces. In Chicago, a diverse group of civic leaders from relevant sectors came together to search for common ground.

Here is where we found it:

We believe immigrants have made invaluable contributions to American life including a well-documented positive impact on our nation as consumers and tax payers.

We believe that the current immigration system is confusing, outdated and detrimental to our economy, criminal justice and education systems, and national security.

We believe that comprehensive immigration reform legislation is urgently needed to address the current system's deficiencies.



We believe that such legislation should include the following:

- An earned path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants that is not unnecessarily restrictive
- A method of determining future flows of immigration that focuses on family reunification and the needs of employers and workers, and addresses national security concerns
- A means of eliminating current backlogs for family- and employment-based immigrant visas and legal permanent resident status
- Access to higher education and a path to citizenship for undocumented youth
- More effective procedures for integrating immigrants once they arrive
- An enforcement system that is applied with consistency and respects the due process of law

We urge our elected officials and other civic leaders to make immigration reform a priority so that we can achieve a vision of America that incorporates our country's founding principles of democracy, social justice, pluralism and social cohesion, and protects our nation's economic and security needs.

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