



May 20, 2020

The Hon. Nancy Pelosi
Speaker,
House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

The Hon. Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader,
Senate
Washington DC 20515

The Hon. Kevin McCarthy,
Minority Leader,
House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

The Hon. Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader,
Senate
Washington DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer and Minority Leader McCarthy,

As bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), a denomination of 3.5 million people of faith, and as the CEOs of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service and Lutheran Services in America we thank you for acting quickly to pass the previous COVID-19 bills, and we also take this opportunity to call on you to work together with urgency to pass the next COVID-19 response package that includes protections for all our nation's immigrant community.

In the ELCA, we are aware of the gifts our new neighbors bring and of the barriers as well as the opportunities they encounter. According to the teaching of our tradition, all people are God's creatures for whom Christ died, and it is our responsibility to respect the human dignity of all.

The important role that immigrants play in the United States is being driven home by the coronavirus pandemic which has forced [hundreds of millions](#) of Americans to remain at home while [tens of millions](#) more continue to report to work to keep the country running. To help policymakers make decisions at this time, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) has [listed](#) our "Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce" that describes the types of positions in the workforce that are "critical to public health and safety, as well as economic and national security."

Refugees and immigrants work in roles that the CISA deems "critical to public health and safety, as well as economic and national security" at a higher rate than the U.S. population overall. For instance: (1) Approximately, [31 percent](#) of refugees and immigrants work in building, grounds cleaning and

maintenance occupations; (2) [25 percent](#) in construction and extraction; and (3) [38 percent](#) work in the farming, fishing, and forestry sector¹.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor's 2017 National Agricultural Workers Survey, [half of all farmworkers are undocumented](#), making their contributions essential to ensuring that the nation's food supply is uninterrupted. Moreover, [nearly one-third](#) of all recipients of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and more than [130,000](#) Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders are in occupations classified as essential through the CISA criteria.

To ensure an effective and sustained recovery, the next COVID-19 stimulus bill should include the following provisions aimed at extending protections to all immigrants and their families.

1. Ensure that all people residing in the U.S. have access to COVID-19 testing and treatment regardless of immigration status. We teach that governments have a moral, God-given, obligation to provide leadership and coordination to ensure there is equitable access to healthcare, with special attention to the needs of the marginalized. Guaranteeing access brings social, economic and epidemiological benefits as well.
2. Everyone who files tax returns should have access to the emergency economic support being made available to all Americans. This must include the [16.7 million people](#) in mixed-status families in the U.S., as well as DACA recipients, TPS holders and undocumented workers, who are disproportionately likely to be essential workers risking their lives on the frontlines of the pandemic. As such, they are critical to preserving public health and supporting the systems that allow millions of Americans to observe social-distancing rules by remaining at home.
3. Ensure that immigrant workers are not unnecessarily removed from the workforce at this critical moment due to expiration of their permission to work in the U.S. and that people with desperately needed specialized skills have the opportunity to use them.- Congress should automatically extend work authorizations for at least those individuals whose documents recently have expired or are set to expire in 2020.
4. Suspend the public charge rule as a criterion in immigration applications. Despite U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services [guidance](#) clarifying that testing, treatment and preventive care related to COVID-19 will not be considered in future public charge determinations, the confusion surrounding the details is nevertheless discouraging even those who are entirely unaffected by the public charge rule—including U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents—from seeking health care and essential services.
5. Guarantee that the fear of immigration enforcement does not stand in the way of individuals accessing necessary services for themselves and their family members. To date, the administration has not issued a [formal statement](#) (as it had been done during the Flint water crisis) declaring that its highest priorities will be promoting life-saving and life-sustaining activities, including by not conducting any immigration enforcement actions at or near hospitals, health care facilities and other COVID-19 testing or quarantine sites or against people traveling to such sites. Additionally, as COVID-19 continues to spread in alarming fashion

¹ Undocumented immigrants comprised 5 percent of the workforce in 2016, according to a study from Pew Research Center, "U.S. unauthorized immigration population estimates, 2016".

within [immigration detention facilities](#) around the country, Congress should ensure that [meaningful changes](#) take place without further delay.

ELCA social teaching understands that immigration, refugee, and asylum policies express who we are as a nation, influence the nation's future character, and affect the lives of millions of people. Immigrants and refugees are valued members of our congregations and communities. Banning or suspending protections during a global pandemic contradicts our commitments as a church and as a nation to be a place of welcome and safety.

Extending assistance to workers who are refugees and immigrants recognizes that they make up a significant portion of the workforce and also supply it with labor in sectors that are critical to ensuring that the U.S. successfully combats the coronavirus pandemic and the resulting economic recession. Ensuring that all people have access to necessary testing and treatment—as well as the legal and financial support to remain home when they are sick or may have been exposed to the coronavirus—is critical to the nation's effort to stanch community spread and beat this virus. We are all in this together.

To that end, we ask for your work on ensuring that the next COVID-19 response package extends its protections and benefits to all of those who contribute to our nation regardless of immigration status. Thank you for your service in Congress and to our nation.

Sincerely,



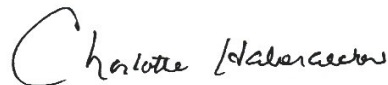
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