

COVID-19 Relief Should Include Pathway to Citizenship for Essential Workers

Undocumented workers make up front lines and communities

- Nearly **5 million undocumented people are working in essential occupations and industries** nationally. In Virginia, about **140,000 essential workers are undocumented**.
- This work in construction, the food supply chain, the care economy, and health care is also essential to ongoing well-being and infrastructure of the country.
- More than being major contributors to the economy, undocumented workers and other immigrants have long ties to their communities. In Virginia, **28,900 adults are married to an undocumented essential worker** and **92,000 children under 18 have a parent who is an undocumented essential worker**. And undocumented essential workers have lived in the United States for 18 years, on average.

Providing a pathway to citizenship would boost the economy and tax revenue

- Undocumented immigrants are major contributors through the taxes they pay. In Virginia, undocumented workers pay around **\$295 million in state and local taxes** each year, and if those workers had full legal status, **Virginia state and local tax revenue would increase by \$100 million per year** according to [2017 estimates](#). **Nationally, over a ten year period, state and federal taxes paid by previously undocumented immigrants would increase by between \$109 billion and \$184 billion**, according to a [2013 estimate](#).
- Research shows that providing legal status and a path to citizenship to undocumented immigrants can **increase federal, state, and local tax revenue** and **generate an increase in state and federal GDP**. It can also **strengthen the social safety net**, through increased income and payroll tax revenue now when it is needed, and provide current workers with access to benefits several decades from now after the near-future financing challenges have eased.
- Other [benefits](#) to this kind of policy include **increased wages, job creation, and even strengthened workplace protections**, for both immigrants and native-born workers. For example, **work authorization for previously undocumented immigrants increases wages by 6% and 15%** in the short to medium term due to improved skills-matching, with additional long-term increases as workers invest in building their skills.

Inclusion is essential to economic recovery as a whole

Despite the fact that so many undocumented immigrants do essential work, pay taxes, and contribute to our communities, they have been left out of relief packages — ineligible for resources like federal stimulus payments or unemployment insurance. Creating a path to citizenship for undocumented essential workers will benefit the economy, but more importantly, it will help ensure relief gets to those who have been risking their lives for the well-being of their communities.

