



UUSJ Vision for Comprehensive Immigration Reform

As of May 2019

BACKGROUND: By definition, comprehensive immigration reform is broad and complex. We summarize on the next page our principles about where we want to see reform, what should stay, what should go and what should be added/deleted revised compared to existing legislation. At the same time, we recognize the “push” factor of violence and poverty in countries south of the US border, and civil unrest in Middle East and North Africa. Other actions addressing these are called for, including technical and economic aid, that cannot be handled through immigration reform.

Current US Immigration Laws:

The Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) of 1965 was the last comprehensive law. It got rid of national origin quotas embedded in earlier laws. The INA’s family reunification focus gave preference to relatives of US citizens and legal permanent residents (LPRs) and also to persons with specialize skills. It limited immigration from the Western Hemisphere however, and required a federal certification of labor shortages before worker visas could be given.

In 1986, President Reagan signed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), sometimes called the “amnesty” law of Reagan which introduced requirements that employers verify their workers’ immigration status but also legalized certain seasonal agricultural workers and long-residing undocumented persons who arrived in the US before 1/1/82. In 1987, an extension to this granted amnesty to children (under 18) of parents being legalized under IRCA.

The 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (Republican-driven but signed by Clinton) increased penalties on immigrants who violated US law, making many more eligible for fast-track deportation (even green card holders) and allowing more immigrants to be detained, where legal access is difficult. This law also set very high standards about who could get legalized (10 years in US plus proving “extreme hardship” to US citizen family if subject were deported) and generally heightened internal enforcement.

After 9/11 funding for internal enforcement grew dramatically – deportations grew from 70,000 in 1996 to 400,000 through 2012. Those who came undocumented and tried to become legal had to leave US and return after 3 or 10 years. Nevertheless, unauthorized immigrants grew from 5 million in 1996 to 12 million in 2006, partly because it got so much harder to go back and forth across the southern border legally for seasonal work and also because it was so hard to become legal.

Hardliners in the Trump Administration continue to take many executive actions hostile to immigrants and refugees, including on national origin grounds.

Principles on which we base our support for comprehensive immigration reform:

- No discrimination based on race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexual orientation or economic status. Diversity in all these aspects is good.
- No family separation for asylum seekers. Family reunification continuing as a significant justification for allowing relatives to come to the US.
- Not a zero-sum game. US spatially and demographically has room for an increased number of immigrants and increases in one category should not require reductions in another. E.g. diversity lottery for low-represented nationalities should not be traded for increases in highly-skilled professional worker categories.
- Permanent solutions for those who have been here for lengthy periods under DACA, TPS, DED and other potentially eligible categories. Reduce backlog of LPR processing.
- Greater attention to needs of refugees both via resettling in US (need ceiling of at least 100,000 a year) and via financial support to third country resettlements.
- Education and skills levels needed can be accomplished through immigrants from many continents, not just Europe. Current trends confirm this.
- Accommodations for seasonal agricultural/fisheries/tourism workers at higher levels with greater flexibility for moving to new employers and worker protections (both safety/health and against exploitation by employer)
- Reform and fund immigration courts to improve due process, dramatically reduce backlog in courts; hold more bond hearings.
- Reduce use of detention; there are better less costly alternatives. Do not detain children. No indefinite detention. Oppose expansion of private corporations involved in the business of detaining immigrants.
- Reduce pressure on local law enforcement to cooperate with immigration enforcers.
- Border security: some level of border security needs funding and non-militarized implementation but oppose significant new physical barriers. Emphasize through practice and training humane treatment of asylum-seekers and other border-crossers, reduce “profiling” and harassment of US citizens at the border.
- Asylum-seekers and vulnerable persons at risk of deportation other than for serious criminal reasons should have access to public defenders, paid lawyers or as a minimum, pro bono legal aid, so support local measures to fund such assistance. Advocate for better access to legal advice for those in detention.

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UUSJ depends on the generosity of its congregational and individual members to fund its work. Thank you!

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