

June 29, 2021

The Honorable Joe Manchin
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senators Manchin and Capito,

As faith leaders from diverse faith traditions in West Virginia, we come to you with urgency, knowing that the COVID-19 crisis has profoundly impacted already marginalized groups in society including Black, Latino, indigenous, immigrant, and refugee communities.

We respectfully request that you include a pathway to citizenship for essential immigrant workers, farmworkers, people with DACA, TPS, and DED, and their families **in the upcoming recovery packages you have prioritized through reconciliation**. An inclusive legislative proposal on immigration relief, which recognizes the dignity of all, is long overdue.

Our immigrant family members and neighbors, who are integral parts of this nation, deserve the protection and opportunity of a clear path to citizenship. Any package should recall the worth and dignity conferred by our Creator, and not exclude or discriminate against anyone based on interactions with our nation's racist criminal justice system. Instead, we're hopeful that a package maximizes eligibility for relief, stabilizing the workforce, ensuring that families stay together, and our communities can thrive.

Essential workers have faced the most significant risks amid the pandemic. And we know that countless immigrant members of our congregations, places of worship, and communities in West Virginia have worked throughout the pandemic as essential workers, providing the basic goods and critical services which have helped us all make it through this terrible season.

And yet, we as a people have treated our immigrant "essential" workers as expendable, as exploitable - extracting their labor while disregarding their humanity. We have excluded them from full citizenship (over [two-thirds](#) of undocumented workers in the US are essential workers) and denied them the full fruits of their contributions to our economy and community life.

While making up only [17%](#) of about 156 million working people in the US, immigrants are disproportionately represented in COVID-19 frontline occupations and essential industries, including being childcare workers, healthcare workers, custodial staff, school employees, and farmworkers, to name a few examples. In West Virginia, approximately [10,000](#) undocumented immigrant workers are at the frontlines of keeping us all healthy and fed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Essential immigrant workers have been, and will continue to be, key to our communities' health and prosperity during the healing of our state and our nation from the pandemic and looking at the future. Immigrants in West Virginia, including hundreds of people with [TPS](#) and [DACA](#), are serving on the frontlines—despite their families and communities receiving little or no relief themselves.

One important step we can take in the coming weeks is to recognize immigrant essential workers and their families for the gifts they bring into their communities, their resiliency, and their contributions to our society by creating a roadmap to citizenship - which West Virginians support. Recent polling from [Data For Progress](#) found that [58% of West Virginians](#) polled were in support of legislation that would create a path to citizenship for essential workers and other undocumented immigrants. We must not exclude some people from relief, keep them in limbo, or punish them twice for having prior contact with a racist and biased criminal legal system.

After years of harmful immigration policies and a year at the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Biden Administration and Congress can and must secure a pathway to citizenship for essential immigrant workers, farmworkers, people with DACA, TPS, and DED, and their families immediately as part of any recovery package being passed in reconciliation.

In doing so, we can take a step toward the state of "right relationship" we seek with our Creator, our neighbors, and all of creation.

Sincerely,

Denis Woods, St. Agnes Parish
Rev. Jeffrey Allen, West Virginia Council of Churches
Rev. Michelle Boomgaard, St. John's Episcopal Church
Rabbi Victor Urecki, B'nai Jacob Synagogue
Rev. Darick Biondi, United Methodist Church and West Virginia Council of Churches