

CLASP Statement for the Record
House Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Immigration Integrity, Security, and Enforcement
“Impact of Illegal Immigration on Social Services”
January 11, 2024

Chairman McClintock, Ranking Member Jayapal, and Members of the Subcommittee on Immigration Integrity, Security, and Enforcement, we thank you for this opportunity to submit a statement for the hearing “Impact of Illegal Immigration on Social Services.” The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) is a national, nonpartisan nonprofit advancing anti-poverty policy solutions that disrupt structural and systemic racism and sexism and remove barriers blocking people from economic security and opportunity. We work at the federal and state levels, supporting policy and practice that makes a difference in the lives of people experiencing conditions of poverty. CLASP works to develop and implement federal, state, and local policies (in legislation, regulation, and implementation) that reduce poverty, improve the lives of people with low incomes, and create pathways to economic security for everyone. That includes directly addressing the barriers people face because of race, ethnicity, gender, disability, and immigration status.

Through high-quality analysis grounded in data and on-the-ground experience, effective advocacy, a strong public voice, and hands-on technical assistance, CLASP develops and promotes new ideas, mobilizes others, and provides guidance to government leaders and advocates to help them implement strategies that improve the lives of people across America. CLASP works to amplify the voices of directly impacted youth, workers, and families and help public officials design and implement effective programs.

As experts on public benefit programs and the impact of policies that affect the wellbeing of immigrant families and children, we submit this statement to underscore the indispensable role immigrants play in supporting and securing the future of our nation. Harms to undocumented immigrants harm all immigrants and their families, especially as pathways to lawful immigration status remain narrow. The restrictions to and underfunding of the asylum process in recent decades further exacerbate these harms. We call on Congress to recognize the importance of immigrants in our nation by implementing reforms that allow immigrant families to prosper by restoring and expanding—not restricting—access to critical programs as well as creating additional pathways to legal status.

- I. Immigrants are fundamental contributing members of their communities, the American economy, and our society.**

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Undocumented immigrants are inextricably interwoven into American families and communities. An estimated 5.2 million children in the United States have at least one undocumented parent, including 4.4 million U.S. citizen children.¹ Parents work hard to pave pathways to prosperity for their children, and their children pave pathways to prosperity for the future of our nation.

Immigrants open businesses at far higher rates than U.S.-born Americans—businesses that secure more patents and offer jobs that pay higher wages than their counterparts.² Nearly a tenth of undocumented immigrants are entrepreneurs, creating jobs and driving American innovation.³ A higher proportion of immigrants participate in the labor force than U.S.-born Americans, at 65.9 percent versus 61.5 percent for non-immigrants.⁴ They fill essential roles in industries facing labor shortages like food service, health care, and education.⁵ Immigrant workers' roles upholding the economy during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic should not be forgotten; 69 percent of all immigrant workers and 74 percent of undocumented workers were employed in essential industries during the pandemic, many while not having access to critical supports themselves.⁶

Moreover, although undocumented immigrants are not eligible for almost any federal benefit programs, they pay billions in federal tax revenue. In 2021, despite a severe backlog in Individual Tax Identification Number (ITIN) applications, immigrant households paid \$524.7 billion in total taxes, including \$346.3 billion in federal taxes.⁷ They also contributed \$178.4 billion in state and local taxes – money that funds schools, highways and roads, hospitals, and other essential services and programs which benefit everyone. If undocumented immigrants were

¹ Randy Capps, Julia Gelatt, Ariel G. Ruiz Soto, Jennifer Van Hook, “Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States, Stable Numbers, Changing Origins,” Migration Policy Institute, December 16, 2020,

<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/unauthorized-immigrants-united-states-stable-numbers-changing-origins>.

² Pierre Azoulay, Benjamin F. Jones, J. Daniel Kim, and Javier Miranda, “Immigrants to the U.S. Create More Jobs than They Take,” KelloggInsight, October 2020,

<https://insight.kellogg.northwestern.edu/article/immigrants-to-the-u-s-create-more-jobs-than-they-take>.

³ American Immigration Council, “Immigrants in United States of America,”

<https://map.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/locations/national/#undocImmigrants>.

⁴ Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Foreign-Born Workers: Labor Force Characteristics — 2022,” U.S. Department of Labor, May 2023, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/forbrn.pdf>.

⁵ Stephanie Ferguson and Makinzi Hoover, “Understanding America’s Labor Shortage: The Most Impacted Industries,” U.S. Chamber of Commerce, January 2024,

<https://www.uschamber.com/workforce/understanding-americas-labor-shortage-the-most-impacted-industries>; Emily

Peck, “Labor shortages plague high-stakes industries,” Axios, August 2023,

<https://www.axios.com/2023/08/27/labor-shortages-air-traffic-health-care-teachers-police>.

⁶ Rocio Perez and Adewale Maye, “Essential and Invisible: The Urgent Case for Supporting Immigrant Essential Workers,” Center for Law and Social Policy, July 2021,

<https://www.clasp.org/publications/report/brief/essential-and-invisible-urgent-case-supporting-immigrant-essential-workers/>.

⁷ American Immigration Council, “American Immigration Council Maps the Impact of Immigrants With New Data on the United States and All 50 States,” November 2023,

<https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/news/american-immigration-council-maps-impact-immigrants-new-data-united-states-and-all-50-states>.

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given full legal status, state and local governments would receive an estimated additional \$2.2 billion in tax income annually due to boosted wages and full compliance with tax code.⁸

State	Undocumented Immigrants' Contribution to State and Local Taxes (2014)	Estimated Additional Contribution to State and Local Taxes if Granted Full Legal Status
Alabama	\$62,312,000	+\$17,794,000
Arizona	\$213,574,000	+\$39,384,000
California	\$3,199,394,000	+\$454,591,000
Colorado	\$139,524,000	+\$32,726,000
Indiana	\$92,200,000	+\$28,701,000
North Carolina	\$277,402,000	+\$93,378,000
New Jersey	\$587,415,000	+\$73,716,000
Texas	\$1,560,896,000	+\$156,090,000
Washington	\$316,624,000	+\$31,662,000
Wisconsin	\$71,792,000	+\$19,899,000

*Figures from the ITEP Report "Undocumented Immigrants' State & Local Tax Contributions."*⁹

In truth, undocumented immigrants help keep social services afloat. Undocumented immigrants generated a surplus of \$100 billion for the Social Security program over the past decade and a surplus of \$35.1 billion for the Medicare Trust Fund from 2000-2011.¹⁰ Additional research also proves that tax revenue from unauthorized immigrants—who tend to be younger—contribute significantly to the fiscal solvency of the Social Security and the Medicare Trust Funds.¹¹ Further restricting immigration could jeopardize the future of these programs, hurting all Americans.

⁸ Lisa Christensen Gee et al., "Undocumented Immigrants' State & Local Tax Contributions." Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, March 2017, <https://itep.org/undocumented-immigrants-state-local-tax-contributions-2017/>.

⁹ Christensen Gee et al., 2017.

¹⁰ New American Economy, "Undocumented Immigrants," 2016, <https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/issues/undocumented-immigrants/>

¹¹ Theresa Cardinal Brown, Kenneth Megan, Jeffery Mason, and Cristobal Ramon, "Immigration's Effect on the Social Security System," Bipartisan Policy Center, November 2018, <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/download/?file=/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Immigrations-Effect-on-the-Social-Security-System.pdf>; Leah Zallman, et al. "Unauthorized Immigrants Prolong the Life of Medicare's Trust Fund," *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 31(1), January 2016: 122–27, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11606-015-3418-z>.

II. Expanding benefits to more people, regardless of their country of origin, is proven to have positive rippling effects on the economy and society.

Savings to states and providers

States, medical providers, and hospitals save billions of dollars every year from Medicaid coverage by reducing the amount of medical care that goes uncompensated. Between 2013-2014, hospitals nationwide saved \$8.6 billion in uncompensated care costs, with those located in states that expanded Medicaid experiencing larger benefits than those located in non-expansion states.¹² Uncompensated care costs in Virginia and Maine, which both expanded Medicaid in 2019, fell by 14 and 13 percent in 2019, respectively. In the states of California and Washington, uncompensated care costs fell even more, by 62 and 49 percent, respectively, between 2013-2017.¹³ Research also has shown that early childhood access to Medicaid provides the government financial returns comparable to the overall United States stock market.¹⁴

Poverty reduction

Studies have also shown that ACA Medicaid expansions led to improvements in the financial well-being of beneficiaries. Medicaid expansion alone pulled an estimated 690,000 American out of poverty.¹⁵ Increased access to health care led to overall debt reduction, reductions in bankruptcy rates, and increased both the amount of child support payments and the likelihood that mothers received child support.¹⁶ Access to Medicaid in early childhood may offer the best returns; evidence shows that Medicaid receipt in early childhood increases the likelihood of employment and reduces the receipt of disability transfer programs, even up to 50 years later.

Stimulation of local economies

In addition, expanding SNAP increases the spending power of those who receive it, benefiting local economies. Increasing \$1 billion in SNAP benefits in a slowing economy increases GDP by

¹²Gideon Lukens, “Uncompensated Care Costs Fell in States That Recently Expanded Medicaid,” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, April 4, 2022,

<https://www.cbpp.org/blog/uncompensated-care-costs-fell-in-states-that-recently-expanded-medicaid>.

¹³Matt Broaddus, “Uncompensated Care Costs Well Down in ACA Medicaid Expansion States,” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, October 2020,

<https://www.cbpp.org/blog/uncompensated-care-costs-well-down-in-aca-medicaid-expansion-states>.

¹⁴ Andrew Goodman-Bacon, “The Long-Run Effects of Childhood Insurance Coverage: Medicaid Implementation, Adult Health, and Labor Market Outcomes,” *American Economic Review*, 11(8), August 2021, <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/aer.20171671>.

¹⁵ Naomi Zewde and Christopher Wimer, “Antipoverty Impact Of Medicaid Growing With State Expansions Over Time,” *Health Affairs*, January 2019, <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hlthaff.2018.05155>.

¹⁶ LuoJia Hu, et al., “The Effect of the Affordable Care Act Medicaid Expansions on Financial Wellbeing,” *Journal of Public Economics*, 163, July 2018: 99–112, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2018.04.009>; Masanori Kuroki, “The Effect of Health Insurance Coverage on Personal Bankruptcy: Evidence from the Medicaid Expansion,” *Review of Economics of the Household*, 19(2), June 2021: 429–51, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11150-020-09492-0>; Lindsey Rose Bullinger, “Child Support and the Affordable Care Act’s Medicaid Expansions,” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 40(1) 2021: 42–77, <https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.22238>.

\$1.54 billion and supports the creation of over 13,000 additional jobs, including 500 in the agricultural sector.¹⁷

Improved health and public health benefits

Beneficiaries of either Medicaid and SNAP also experience improved health. A large body of research links SNAP with lower risk of heart disease and obesity among adults who received SNAP as children, greater adherence to medications, and reduced health care costs.¹⁸ Supportive housing additionally is associated with reductions in health care costs.¹⁹ Moreover, when people are covered by health insurance, they are more likely to use health services and get preventive, life-saving treatment, like vaccines, including those for tetanus, pertussis, and HPV.²⁰ Increasing vaccination rates is essential to protecting the public's health on a whole by strengthening herd immunity.

Studies have demonstrated how Medicaid expansions resulted in dietary improvements and reductions in risky health behaviors among potential beneficiaries.²¹ Oregon's 2008 pilot of the Emergency Medicaid Plus program, which expanded prenatal care to low-income legal and undocumented immigrant women, increased receipt of prenatal care, reduced infant mortality, lowered high-risk low-birth weight births, and increased rates of recommended screenings and vaccinations.²² These benefits improve overall maternal and infant health, providing a foundation of good health for the next generation.

These benefits extend beyond the recipient of expanded health care access. When parents are able to access health coverage themselves, their kids are more likely to be able to access the

¹⁷ Patrick Canning and Brian Stacy, "The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Economy: New Estimates of the SNAP Multiplier," Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, July 2019, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details/?pubid=93528>.

¹⁸ Stephen Carlson and Joseph Llobrera, "SNAP Is Linked With Improved Health Outcomes and Lower Health Care Costs," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, December 2022, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-is-linked-with-improved-health-outcomes-and-lower-health-care-costs>.

¹⁹ National Conference of State Legislatures, "Snapshot: Addressing Health Outcomes Through Supportive Housing," February 2023, <https://www.ncsl.org/health/addressing-health-outcomes-through-supportive-housing>.

²⁰ Peng-jun Lu, Alissa O'Halloran, and Walter W. Williams, "Impact of Health Insurance Status on Vaccination Coverage Among Adult Populations," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 48(6), June 2015, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0749379714007193>.

²¹ Xi He, Rigoberto A. Lopez, and Rebecca Boehm, "Medicaid Expansion and Non-alcoholic Beverage Choices by Low-income Households," *Health Economics*, 29(11), 2020: 1327–42, <https://doi.org/10.1002/hec.4133>; Chad Cotti, Erik Nesson, and Nathan Tefft, "Impacts of the ACA Medicaid Expansion on Health Behaviors: Evidence from Household Panel Data," *Health Economics*, 28 (2), Feb. 2019: 219–44, <https://doi.org/10.1002/hec.3838>.

²² Jonas J. Swartz, Jens Hainmueller, Duncan Lawrence, and Maria I. Rodriguez, "Oregon's Expansion of Prenatal Care Improved Utilization Among Immigrant Women," *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, Volume 23, July 2018, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10995-018-2611-1>; Jonas J. Swartz, MD, MPH, Jens Hainmueller, PhD, MSc, MPA, Duncan Lawrence, PhD, MA, and Maria I. Rodriguez, MD, MPH* "Expanding Prenatal Care to Unauthorized Immigrant Women and the Effects on Infant Health," *Obstet Gynecol.*, 130(5), November 2017, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5679477/>.

health care they are eligible for.²³ The research also shows that children’s access to health care coverage increases their use of preventive care, leading to better health as adults with fewer hospitalizations and emergency room visits.²⁴

Improved educational outcomes

Extensive research has documented the long term benefits when children have access to health care, including greater educational attainment and economic outcomes.²⁵ Additionally, both nutrition and Medicaid benefits are linked to improved education outcomes among children, such as better attendance, behavior, academic performance and achievement, and higher high school and college graduation rates.²⁶ Students where free lunch is provided to all students of a school (known as the Community Eligibility Provision) may benefit through overall improved academic scores.²⁷

There are clear takeaways from the research: expanding public benefits allows low-income people to live healthier lives and contributes to their educational and economic wellbeing and public benefit programs strengthen the economy and public health.

III. Policies restricting immigrants from benefits hurts the nation’s economy and weakens public health.

Undocumented immigrants are largely ineligible for public benefit programs, with only a few limited exceptions. The 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) created eligibility distinctions between “qualified” and “nonqualified” immigrants in an attempt to deter immigration to the United States. Qualified immigrants, which includes

²³ <https://ccf.georgetown.edu/2017/03/21/health-coverage-for-parents-and-caregivers-helps-children/>.

²⁴ Julia Paradise, “The Impact of the Children’s Health Insurance Program: What Does the Research Tell Us?,” KFF, (July 17, 2014),

<https://www.kff.org/medicaid/issue-brief/the-impact-of-the-childrens-health-insurance-program-chip-what-does-the-research-tell-us/>; Laura Wherry, Sarah Miller, Robert Kaestner, and Bruce D. Meyer, “Childhood Medicaid Coverage and Later Life Health Care Utilization,” National Bureau for Economic Research, February 2015, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w20929.pdf>.

²⁵ Karina Wagnerman, Alisa Chester, and Joan Alker, “Medicaid is a Smart Investment in Children,” Georgetown University Health Policy Institute: Center for Children and Families (March 2017) <https://ccf.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/MedicaidSmartInvestment.pdf>.

²⁶ Food Research and Action Center, “School Meals are Essential for Student Health and Learning,” August 2019, https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/School-Meals-are-Essential-Health-and-Learning_FNL.pdf; Sarah R. Cohodes, et al., “The Effect of Child Health Insurance Access on Schooling: Evidence from Public Insurance Expansions,” *The Journal of Human Resources*, 51 (3), 2016: 727–59, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26449870>; George L. Wehby, “The Impact Of Household Health Insurance Coverage Gains On Children’s Achievement In Iowa: Evidence From The ACA: Study Examines the Impact of Household Health Insurance Coverage on Children’s Achievement,” *Health Affairs*, 41(1), January 2022: 35–43, <https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2021.01222>; Sarah Miller and Laura R. Wherry, “The Long-Term Effects of Early Life Medicaid Coverage,” *Journal of Human Resources*, January 2018, <https://doi.org/10.3368/jhr.54.3.0816.8173R1>.

²⁷ John Gordanier, Orgul Ozturk, Breyon Williams, and Crystal Zhan, “Free Lunch for All! The Effect of the Community Eligibility Provision on Academic Outcomes,” *Economics of Education Review*, Volume 77, August 2020, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0272775719307605>.

legal permanent residents and certain immigrants who have refugee status or who have been granted asylum, would be able to access federal safety net programs after five years of residence. The eligibility rules for qualified immigrants are complex and variable based on the type of immigration status and additional waiting period and exceptions to said waiting periods based on age or pregnancy further complicate eligibility rules. Demonizing undocumented immigrants for being a drain on public resources not only flies in the face of the evidence, but also largely serves to scare immigrants with legal status—like refugees and legal permanent residents—away from accessing public benefit programs for which they are eligible.

Health Services

Confusion and fear over the 2019 public charge policy caused a number of immigrants, regardless of whether or not they were subjected to the rule, to avoid or disenroll from public benefits and even affected their willingness to access COVID-19 vaccines.²⁸ This puts large swaths of the population's health at risk. In 2019, even before public charge policy was implemented in February 2020, 15.6 percent of all adults in immigrant families avoided government benefits because of green card concerns.²⁹ Despite the Biden administration reversing the public charge restrictions, the chilling effect continued in 2022; 13 percent of adults in immigrant families and one in six adults in immigrant families with children reported avoiding a safety net program because of immigration concerns.³⁰

A study evaluating the economic impact of the public charge policy found that due to immigrants avoiding public benefits, they shift their spending priorities and spend less, resulting in a loss to local economies.³¹ The study's authors estimate that a drop in immigrant enrollment in public benefits translates to a loss of \$12.5 billion in lost federal benefits, resulting in negative local economic impacts. Additionally, hospitals and medical providers would lose income with a reduction in CHIP and Medicaid enrollment. Safety net clinics and hospitals were estimated to

²⁸ Drishti Pillai and Samantha Artiga, "2022 Changes to the Public Charge Inadmissibility Rule and the Implications for Health Care," KFF, May 2022,

<https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/issue-brief/2022-changes-to-the-public-charge-inadmissibility-rule-and-the-implications-for-health-care/>

²⁹ Hamutal Bernstein, Dulce Gonzalez, Michael Karpman, and Stephen Zuckerman, "Amid Confusion over the Public Charge Rule, Immigrant Families Continued Avoiding Public Benefits in 2019," Urban Institute, May 2020, <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/amid-confusion-over-public-charge-rule-immigrant-families-continued-avoiding-public-benefits-2019>.

³⁰ Dulce Gonzalez and Hamutal Bernstein, "One in Four Adults in Mixed-Status Families Did Not Participate in Safety Net Programs in 2022 Because of Green Card Concerns," Urban Institute, August 2023, <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/one-four-adults-mixed-status-families-did-not-participate-safety-net-programs>; Dulce Gonzalez, Jennifer Haley, and Genevieve M. Kenney, "One in Six Adults in Immigrant Families with Children Avoided Public Programs in 2022 Because of Green Card Concerns," Urban Institute, November 2023, <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/one-six-adults-immigrant-families-children-avoided-public-programs-2022>; Juliana Zhou, "One Year After Improved Public Charge Rule, Biden Administration Must Do More for Immigrant Families" Center for Law and Social Policy, December 2023, <https://www.clasp.org/blog/public-charge-biden-must-do-better/>.

³¹ Fiscal Policy Institute, "Only Wealthy Immigrants Need Apply: The Chilling Effects of 'Public Charge'," November 2019, <https://fiscalspolicy.org/publiccharge2019>.

lose \$346-\$624 million in the first year of the public charge policy, impacting their ability to stay open and serve their communities.³²

Nutrition

Inadequate access to nutrition due to eligibility restrictions and misinformation can have a serious impact on a child's mental and physical wellbeing.³³ Since SNAP benefits are determined based on the size of a household, one person having access to the program can help feed everyone in their family.³⁴ Mixed-status families, however, may receive lower SNAP allotments per person because benefits are adjusted to the number of eligible people in the household, and immigrants subject to the five year bar and undocumented immigrants are not eligible for SNAP, nor are they counted as a household member when determining the amount of the household's SNAP benefit. In 2019, this applied to 5.2 million households that had at least one member who was eligible based on immigration status and at least one who was not, while another 1.2 million households were completely ineligible for SNAP benefits due to their immigration status.³⁵ Due to these restrictions, immigrant families disproportionately experience food insecurity.³⁶ Confusing SNAP policies discourage immigrants who are food insecure from applying for nutrition benefits, trapping them in a cycle of poverty, yet simultaneously punishing them for being unable to achieve self-sufficiency.

Housing

Although not subject to the five year bar, immigrant eligibility rules for housing assistance differ significantly from program to program, which can feel so overwhelming to some immigrant households that many do not even bother applying.³⁷ Immigrants who are undocumented are not eligible for major rental assistance programs like housing choice vouchers (HCVs) or public housing personally, but they are allowed to live with eligible family members, including children. Federal rental assistance programs serve some mixed-status families at a prorated rate, similar to SNAP benefits. In 2017, the Congressional Review estimated that a total of 25,000

³² Nina Patel, Swapna Reddy, and Natalia Wilson, "Public Charge Rule and Its Impact on Child Health: A Call to Action," *Pediatrics*, 146(6), December 2020

<https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/146/6/e2020001495/33534/Public-Charge-Rule-and-Its-Impact-on-Child-Health>

³³ Alice Aluoch and Juliana Zhou, "Congress Must Simplify Confusing SNAP Rules That Contribute to Food Insecurity among Immigrant Families," Center for Law and Social Policy, July 2023, <https://www.clasp.org/blog/congress-must-simplify-confusing-snap-rules-that-contribute-to-food-insecurity-among-immigrant-families/>.

³⁴ First Focus on Children, "Lift The Bar Act Fact Sheet," April 2023, <https://firstfocus.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Lift-The-Bar-Act-Fact-Sheet-2023.pdf>

³⁵ Valerie Lacarte, Lillie Hinkle and Briana L. Broberg, "SNAP Access and Participation in U.S.-Born and Immigrant Households: A Data Profile," Migration Policy Institute, March 2023, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/snap-us-immigrant-households>.

³⁶ Bovell-Ammon et al., "Trends in Food Insecurity and SNAP Participation among Immigrant Families of U.S.-Born Young Children," April 2019, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6517901/>.

³⁷ Maggie McCarty and Abigail F. Kolker, "Noncitizen Eligibility for Federal Housing Programs," Congressional Research Service January 2023, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R46462.pdf>

mixed status families received rental assistance—only 0.5 percent of the nationwide assistance caseload.³⁸ Importantly, HUD’s economic analysis found that denying assistance to mixed-status households would “increase subsidy costs by roughly \$200 million annually, as mixed-status families receiving a reduced benefit would be replaced by families receiving full benefits.”

Unlike other forms of housing assistance, emergency housing programs like emergency shelters, transitional housing, or other homelessness prevention programs that provide short term relief are often available for all families in need, regardless of immigration status, because the housing is owned by the grant recipient. However, if the program operates by issuing rental assistance payments to individuals or another private owner, only certain immigrants are eligible.³⁹ This distinction becomes particularly important with permanent supportive housing, where assistance is often given through vouchers. Many of these programs are also not designed to serve immigrant populations and therefore often lack the case management, language access supports, or integration services needed to assist immigrant families, especially recent arrivals.

IV. Expanding access to benefits for immigrants does not increase migration.

Despite claims that access to safety net programs increases the flow of migration, extensive research and observation has proven over decades that this is categorically false. People migrate to the U.S. primarily to reunite with family that live in the U.S., seek economic opportunity in the form of jobs (not public benefits), and to escape danger due to gang violence and government corruption.⁴⁰

Nonqualified immigrants, in the language of PRWORA, which include undocumented immigrants, are restricted from almost every federal safety net program. As we can observe from migration patterns over the last 27 years after PRWORA, these restrictions on safety net programs did not deter people from migrating to the United States.⁴¹ This hypothesis has been studied internationally – research on migration to Europe shows where immigrants choose to settle is not likely based on where there are fewest restrictions to benefit programs.⁴²

In addition, there is no evidence of interstate migration due to increasing access to benefits. A 2019 study into states that funded their own expansions of health care benefits for lawful

³⁸ Maggie McCarty and Jameson A. Carter, “HUD’s Proposal to End Assistance to Mixed Status Families,” Congressional Research Service, July 2019, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IN/IN11121>.

³⁹ [8 U.S. Code § 1641](#)

⁴⁰ National Immigration Forum, “Push or Pull Factors: What Drives Central American Migrants to the U.S.?” July 2019, <https://immigrationforum.org/article/push-or-pull-factors-what-drives-central-american-migrants-to-the-u-s/>.

⁴¹ “U.S. Immigrant Population and Share over Time, 1850-Present,” Migration Policy Institute, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/immigrant-population-over-time>.

⁴² Aaron Ponce, “Is Welfare a Magnet for Migration? Examining Universal Welfare Institutions and Migration Flows,” *Social Forces*, 98(1), September 2019: 245–278, <https://academic.oup.com/sf/article-abstract/98/1/245/5182335>; Corrado Giulietti, “The welfare magnet hypothesis and the welfare take-up of migrants,” IZA World of Labor, 2014, <https://wol.iza.org/uploads/articles/37/pdfs/welfare-magnet-hypothesis-and-welfare-take-up-of-migrants.pdf>

permanent immigrant children and pregnant women revealed that they were unlikely to experience in-migration of these groups of people from other states.⁴³ Social networks and economic opportunities are more likely to attract people to migrate, not necessarily generosity or availability of benefits.

People migrate for a variety of reasons, but migrating to take advantage of safety net programs is not one of them.

V. Recommendations

A. Adequately fund states and localities to welcome and meet the changing needs of newcomers.

Most federal housing programs that serve immigrants who have recently arrived or asylum seekers are categorized as emergency services: they are viewed as a one-time, rapid response service. For example, the Shelter and Services Program (SSP) run by the Federal Emergency Management Agency funds groups that provide shelter and other eligible services to “noncitizen migrants” who have come into contact with the Department of Homeland Security and been released from custody while awaiting their immigration proceedings. Programs like SSP and the Emergency Food and Shelter Program need substantially more funding. There must also be more federal coordination on how resources are allocated and to which localities asylum seekers are sent. Local shelters should be accurately informed about the numbers of asylum seekers they will be sent in order for them to prepare. Additionally, while these programs help community-based organizations provide critical welcoming services and infrastructure, they do not bolster communities for long-term success.

In addition to exploring new funding streams, Congress must adequately fund existing housing and homelessness assistance programs so that they can serve more eligible households. As few as a quarter of people who are eligible for a housing choice voucher receive one, and over 550,000 people experience unsheltered homelessness on any given night. Rental and homelessness assistance programs are so grossly underfunded that the majority of people who need assistance don’t receive it, especially eligible immigrants. These programs should be offered in all languages spoken and understood by eligible immigrants.

Congress must also invest in the longer-term needs of arriving immigrants. Our overall federal funding strategy for welcoming new arrivals must expand beyond emergency shelter to long-term resettlement. Community-based groups need flexible grant funding to provide the full suite of stabilization needs such as transitional housing, case management services, and legal assistance. Forcing new arrivals to exist in limbo by not adequately funding the necessary short

⁴³ Vasil I. Yassenov, et al. “Public Health Insurance Expansion for Immigrant Children and Interstate Migration of Low-Income Immigrants,” *JAMA Pediatrics*, 174(1), January 2020, <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2755835>.

and long-term supports prevents newcomers from acclimating to the U.S. and beginning to work as they hope to, thus also depriving the U.S. of the economic and social benefits of immigration.

B. Restore access to health coverage, nutrition, and other safety net programs that improve the wellbeing of immigrant families.

Congress should provide support to states to expand coverage to health care, nutrition, and other safety net programs. Providing families access to these critical benefits ensure children's healthy development. In states that have expanded health coverage for pregnant people, research has shown better outcomes for children due to pre and post natal health care availability. As previously mentioned, child health is closely linked to that of their parents; even when children are U.S. citizens, they are less likely to be enrolled in benefits if their caregivers are ineligible for those same benefits. Children with immigrant parents are twice as likely to be uninsured than children with U.S. citizen parents, despite the vast majority of those children in immigrant families being U.S. citizens themselves. Without the PRWORA restrictions on lawfully present immigrants, 1.2 million more people nationwide, including 282,000 children, would be eligible for SNAP or for higher SNAP benefit amounts.⁴⁴

Congress should support legislation to restore access to coverage for immigrant families. Since the passage of PRWORA in 1996 lawful permanent residents (LPR) cannot access benefits to which they contribute for five years after achieving LPR status. Other authorized immigrants such as those with Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) have been completely barred from coverage. The LIFT the BAR Act (H.R.4170/S.2038) would restore access to public benefits for immigrants authorized to be in the United States. Similarly, the HEAL for Immigrant Families Act (H.R.5008/S.2646) would restore access to public benefits for immigrants authorized to be in the United States, and also expand health coverage to undocumented immigrants through expanded Affordable Care Act coverage and providing state options to expand coverage.

Congress should support both bills which will improve public health for all of our communities, help provide support for immigrants and their families to better ensure child wellbeing, and assist states and localities in their commitments to welcoming immigrants and providing for their residents.

C. Expand access to and expedite work permit applications for asylum seekers and migrants.

The Biden administration has made strides in improving the work authorization process by extending work permit validity periods for certain groups – including asylum seekers – to five

⁴⁴ Lacarte, Hinkle, and Broberg, 2023.

years, reducing processing delays and bureaucratic burdens for both applicants and agencies.⁴⁵ Additionally, it has made beneficiaries of humanitarian parole programs immediately eligible to apply for work authorization and stated its intention to expedite processing for work permits for this population.

However, due to a provision of the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act, asylum seekers are only able to be granted work permits after six months.⁴⁶ The long wait time makes it more difficult for newcomers to be self-sufficient in those first months, forcing them to join the unregulated labor market or to rely on their communities and localities to support them. There is broad bipartisan support for dramatically reducing the time period it takes for asylum seekers to obtain work permits, who are often waiting years for their cases to be adjudicated.⁴⁷ Doing so would allow newcomers to support themselves and their families and participate more fully in their local economies, which in turn will reduce pressure on states and localities.

Moreover, the U.S. could greatly benefit from the labor that immigrants are eager to supply. There is a labor shortage in the manufacturing, farm work, and hospitality industries, and yet newly arrived immigrants face major hurdles to obtaining work permits.⁴⁸ As with so many other issues, policies that help immigrants also helps our country and policies that harm immigrants also harms our country. Simplifying the work permit process for immigrant groups like asylum seekers will benefit the U.S. economy and ease our country's burgeoning labor shortage.

D. Expand pathways to legal status and streamline existing immigration processes to modernize our immigration system.

⁴⁵ Department of Homeland Security, "Fact Sheet: The Biden-Harris Administration Takes New Actions to Increase Border Enforcement and Accelerate Processing for Work Authorizations, While Continuing to Call on Congress to Act," September 2023,

<https://www.dhs.gov/news/2023/09/20/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-takes-new-actions-increase-border>.

⁴⁶ "At Least Let Them Work": The Denial of Work Authorization and Assistance for Asylum Seekers in the United States," Human Rights Watch, November 2013,

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/11/12/least-let-them-work/denial-work-authorization-and-assistance-asylum-seekers-united>.

⁴⁷ Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, "A Mounting Asylum Backlog and Growing Wait Times," Syracuse University, December 2021, <https://trac.syr.edu/immigration/reports/672/>; "Collins, Sinema Introduce Bill to Help Asylum Seekers Obtain Jobs More Quickly," Susan Collins, February 03, 2023

<https://www.collins.senate.gov/newsroom/02/03/2023/collins-sinema-introduce-bill-to-help-asylum-seekers-obtain-jobs-more-quickly>.

⁴⁸ Ferguson and Hoover, 2024; Jasmine Garsd, "There's a labor shortage in the U.S. Why is it so hard for migrants to legally work?" NPR, August 29, 2023,

<https://www.npr.org/2023/08/26/1195670024/theres-a-labor-shortage-in-the-u-s-why-is-it-so-hard-for-migrants-to-legally-work>; Johannes Lang And Zuzana Cepl, "The US is facing a labor shortage — immigration is the solution,"

The Hill, August 18, 2023,

<https://thehill.com/opinion/immigration/4156900-the-us-is-facing-a-labor-shortage-immigration-is-the-solution/>.

Congressional inaction to expand pathways to legal immigration status as well as insufficient resources to process immigration applications has contributed to the delays in our immigration and asylum system. Pressure at the border will decrease if refugee admissions and other legal pathways are expanded. Congress must adopt common sense and humane solutions to welcome people at the border. This includes hiring more immigration judges to process asylum claims, guaranteeing legal representation to ensure that asylum seekers have a fair chance, and adequately funding United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, which ensures that immigration-related applications are processed in a timely fashion. 10.2 million immigrants who have lived in the United States for an average of 16 years still do not have a pathway to legal status and citizenship.⁴⁹ Providing a pathway to citizenship for this entire population would not only dramatically improve their economic well being, but also boost wages for American workers across the board.⁵⁰ It also has the potential to lift 250,000 children living in these families out of poverty.⁵¹

At the same time, 1.8 million people are waiting in the employment-based immigrant visa backlog and 8.3 million relatives of Americans are stuck in the family-based backlog.⁵² Depending on the nation of origin of the applicant, average wait times can be up to 20 years. The broken visa system continues to be a detriment to American businesses and to keep families separated for extensive amounts of time. Congress should pass bills, such as the Reuniting Families Act (H.R.5560), that modernize our immigration visa system.

VI. Conclusion

It is critical that Congress move beyond a misguided focus on border enforcement, and instead advance solutions that address the shifts in global migration, meet the immediate and long-term needs of asylum seekers as well as the communities receiving them, and modernize an outdated immigration system that fails to meet labor demands. It is also important to note that many of the challenges we are facing today are a product of insufficient resources and harmful policies that make accessing asylum and other forms of legal status a difficult and lengthy process and create barriers for immigrants in accessing work authorization as well as critical public benefits. In addition to ensuring that the federal government provides sufficient resources for states and localities to meet the needs of asylum seekers, increased coordination between the federal

⁴⁹ Giovanni Peri and Reem Zaiour, "Citizenship for Undocumented Immigrants Would Boost U.S. Economic Growth," Center for American Progress, June 2021, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/citizenship-undocumented-immigrants-boost-u-s-economic-growth/>.

⁵⁰ Peri and Zaiour, 2021.

⁵¹ Children Thrive Action Network, "A Path to Citizenship is Essential for Children to Thrive," 2021, <https://childrethriveaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/National.pdf>.

⁵² David J. Bier, "1.8 Million in Employment-Based Green Card Backlog," Cato Institute, 2023, <https://www.cato.org/blog/18-million-employment-based-green-card-backlog>; David J. Bier, "8.3 Million Relatives of U.S. Citizens & Legal Residents Awaited Green Cards in 2022," Cato Institute, 2023, <https://www.cato.org/blog/83-million-relatives-us-citizens-legal-residents-await-green-cards>.

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government and localities receiving and sending migrants would also improve resource allocation.

It is also our position as anti-poverty policy experts that Congress must expand access to public benefits and legal pathways for immigrants—those newly arrived and those that have been here for decades—to support the health and well-being of immigrants and their families as well as their ability to contribute to the workforce. Immigrants remain a critical asset to our country, and we must support their ability to thrive.

We thank you again for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record. For any questions, please contact Wendy Cervantes, Director of Immigration and Immigrant Families, at wcervantes@clasp.org.