

NLC RESOLUTION #2013-20**IN SUPPORT OF COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM**

WHEREAS, historically, the cities and towns of the United States are a melting pot of multiple cultures and nationalities based on our nation's history of welcoming immigrants; and

WHEREAS, when admitted through a well-regulated system, immigrants strengthen the United States by creating economic opportunities, increasing America's scientific and cultural resources, strengthening our ties with other nations, fulfilling humanitarian commitments, and supporting family ties and family values that are necessary to build strong communities; and

WHEREAS, failure on the part of the federal government to secure the borders, track visa recipients in the interior, or enforce worksite laws allows illegal immigration to thrive, with an estimated 11.2 million residents living and working in the United States without legal authorization or proper documentation¹; and

WHEREAS, despite increases in border security and upgrades in tracking technology, approximately 500,000 people continue to enter the United States illegally each year²; and

WHEREAS, 30-40 percent of undocumented workers in the U.S. entered legally and overstayed their student, tourist, or employment visas³; and

WHEREAS, the worksite enforcement program does not adequately deter employers who willingly hire unauthorized workers because they face little likelihood that the federal government will investigate, fine, or criminally prosecute them; and it does not help employers who genuinely want to follow the law because their employee verification efforts are hindered by the extensive use of fraudulent documents; and

WHEREAS, the lack of infrastructure and capacity at the federal level makes the federal government unable to adequately track the entry and exit of visitors and temporary workers, and it creates unacceptable application backlogs and long delays, which provide strong disincentives for foreign nationals to abide by the legal means to enter or remain in the country; and

WHEREAS, approximately 268,000 workers in 2011⁴, equal to about half of the undocumented seasonal workers in the United States⁵, used the current temporary, unskilled worker programs (the H2-A and H2-B visas); and

¹ Jeffrey S. Passel and Mark Hugo Lopez, "Up to 1.7 Million Unauthorized Immigrant Youth May Benefit from New Deportation Rules," Pew Hispanic Center (Aug. 2012).

² Gordon H. Hanson, "The Economics and Policy of Illegal Immigration in the United States," Migration Policy Institute (Dec. 2009).

³ U.S. Government Accountability Office, "Overstay Enforcement: Additional Mechanisms for Collecting, Assessing, and Sharing Data Could Strengthen DHS's Efforts but Would Have Costs" (Apr. 2011).

⁴ U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office of Immigration Statistics, *2011 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics* (2012).

⁵ Steven Zahniser et. al, "The Potential Impact of Changes in Immigration Policy on U.S. Agriculture and the Market for Hired Farm Labor: A Simulation Analysis," U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service (May 2012).

WHEREAS, the current immigration system inadequately addresses the growing numbers of individuals wishing entrance to the United States through a temporary work visa program or as legal permanent residents; and

WHEREAS, roughly two-thirds of undocumented adult immigrants have lived in the United States for ten years or more, 1 million unauthorized immigrants are children, and another 4.5 million U.S.-citizen children have at least one undocumented parent¹; and these families are forced to live “underground,” unable to get drivers’ licenses or car insurance in most states, unlikely to obtain health insurance, and afraid to report crimes to local law enforcement; and

WHEREAS, since immigrants are barred from most federal public assistance, the burden of providing social services, education, and health care falls to the state and local governments, who are increasingly feeling the financial impact of both legal and illegal immigrants living in their communities.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the National League of Cities (NLC) urges Congress to move quickly to enact comprehensive reform of the current immigration laws with support of the Administration to implement the immigration laws effectively; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the federal government enforce its current immigration laws consistently and vigorously to eliminate illegal entry at the borders, visa overstays, working without proper documentation, and employing undocumented workers; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the federal government must increase enforcement of visa overstays through the full implementation and staffing of the US-VISIT and SEVIS programs; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that local personnel, such as police officers, fire inspectors, educators, health personnel and social service personnel, should not be conscripted into federal service because the federal government has not adequately funded and staffed its immigration enforcement agencies; and the federal government must not transfer the responsibility of enforcing U.S. immigration laws to local personnel by making undocumented status in the U.S. a criminal offense; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the federal government must strengthen its worksite enforcement capacity and dramatically increase enforcement efforts at places of employment, as well as providing employers with a universal, reliable, effective, secure, non-discriminatory, and non-counterfeitable employee verification system, using the most up-to-date technology that will minimize fraud; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the federal government must increase its capacity and infrastructure to enforce the laws and provide efficient means for foreign nationals to obtain legal authorization for temporary visas or legal permanent residency; and

¹ Paul Taylor et. al, “Unauthorized Immigrants: Length of Residency, Patterns of Parenthood,” Pew Hispanic Center (Dec. 2011).

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the federal government must provide an appropriate, legal means of immigration, as is determined to be necessary and effective for the United States, for foreign nationals that want to work here temporarily, become legal permanent residents, or gain citizenship; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that NLC supports establishment of a process whereby undocumented immigrants currently living in the United States may earn legalized status through payment of appropriate fees and back taxes, background checks, absence of criminal or gang activity, consistent work history, and meeting English and civics requirements; and that the immigrants who have earned such legal status should also be able to apply for citizenship through additional processes, as appropriate and practical, as long as they do not move ahead of applicants with proper documentation waiting to adjust their status or those waiting on lists in their home countries; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the federal government should provide local governments with financial and technical assistance to alleviate the local impact of new immigrants, including the costs of providing social services, health care, education, language services, and civic integration; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that NLC also supports federal legislation like the “Dream Act” that can facilitate state efforts to offer in-state tuition to undocumented students and provide certain students with a path to U.S. citizenship.