

Immigrants and Immigration



Good for South Carolina

Immigration to the U.S. is complex. We have categories for lawful permanent residents (LPRs) nonimmigrants, refugees and asylees, and a process for LPRs to become naturalized citizens, who can then vote.

Foreign born individuals can get their 'green cards' through either family or employment sponsored immigration; or by winning one of a limited number of immigrant visas through the immigrant diversity lottery program. That program provides up to 50,000 immigrant visas available annually to individuals from countries with low rates of immigration to the U.S. Visa numbers are also given to refugees who seek protection if they have a well-founded fear of persecution on specifically enumerated grounds.

After residing in the United States for five years, or three years in some circumstances, LPRs are eligible to apply for U.S. citizenship as naturalized citizens. Naturalized citizens can vote. In South Carolina, more than two out of five immigrants are naturalized U.S. citizens. In 2018, 111,188 immigrants were naturalized.

Nonimmigrants are permitted to enter on a temporary basis. Examples are tourists, students, professional, artists and entertainers, executives, agricultural and seasonal workers, diplomats, or reporters.

Undocumented immigrants are present in the U.S. without the government's permission because they entered unlawfully without being inspected by an immigration officer; they used false documents; or they entered with a visa, but stayed too long or worked without permission.

Immigrants and immigration are good for South Carolina.

Editor's Note: The following has been prepared for HCDP by Immigration attorney Donusia Lipinski of Myrtle Beach

The Immigration and Nationality Act was enacted in 1952 and has been vilified for creating a rigid immigration quota system based on national origins and racial categories. Fortunately, a bill signed in 1965 replaced the national-origins quota system, and provided for preference categories, such as relatives of U.S. citizens or permanent residents, those with skills deemed useful to the United States, or refugees of violence or unrest. Rather than quotas, it placed caps on immigration, in each category, and as well as per-country limitations.

Although our laws are grounded in family unity, diversity, entrepreneurship, innovation, and attracting skilled labor, we have not always lived up to these ideals. In today's world, immigrants have been scapegoated, demonized, and falsely blamed for many of the ills of our country without focusing on their contributions to the fabric of who we are.

Despite the rhetoric and polarization, we must always remember that we are a nation of immigrants, and that immigration is good for our communities, our state, country, and economy. Immigrants are our friends, neighbors, taxpayers, the people we sit next to in church. They are us.

The top countries of origin for immigrants in South Carolina in 2018, were Mexico (24%), India (7%), Germany (5%), Honduras (5%) and the Philippines (5%). Foreign born residents make up a vital, educated part of our workforce. One in 20 South Carolinians is an immigrant. In 2018, they comprised 6 percent of the labor force. The two largest shares of immigrants of all industry workers, are in construction and agriculture.

Immigrants, including undocumented immigrants pay billions of dollars in federal and state taxes. Immigrant-led households paid \$1.5 billion in federal taxes and \$535,000 million in state and local taxes in 2018.

Undocumented immigrants paid an estimated \$99.4 million in federal taxes and \$60.8 million in state and local taxes. DACA recipients, those children who entered the U.S. before they were 16 years old as of June 12, 2007, and DACA eligible individuals, paid an estimated \$11.1 million in state and local taxes in 2018. They are a vital to our economy. It is estimated that 5,750 DACA recipients were living here as of March 20, 2020.

But beyond the billions of dollars immigrants pay in tax dollars, they are human beings who aspire to thrive, to take care of their families, to fully engage, to abide by the law, and to regularize their status. Unfortunately, our current laws either fence undocumented immigrants in, or keep them out.

In South Carolina, tens of thousands of U.S. citizens live with at least one family member who is undocumented. Most undocumented immigrants have lived in the US. for more than 10 years; many have started businesses, or work in construction, agriculture, clean houses, and work in nursing homes.

Essentials of any immigration reform policies

Immigrants are entitled to due process and equal protection. These rights are minimized and eviscerated by policies like mandatory detention, insufficient waivers of some of the grounds of

inadmissibility, the separation of children from their parents, the placement of children in cages, the performance of hysterectomies on immigrant women; taking DNA from detainees; the unavailability of independent immigration courts, and depriving asylum applicants of their right to apply for asylum at the border and by the 3/10 year bars.

However, relief should be provided for DACA recipients and for undocumented immigrants by:

1. Eliminating the “three and ten year’ bars to admission. Many immigrants who entered the U.S. without a visa and subsequently fall in love, or have a US Citizen or LPR relative or an employer file a petition for them, have no way to regularize their status unless they live outside the US for 10 years. In many cases, a waiver is not available. Eliminating this bar to admissibility would allow immigrants to apply for their visas at the U.S. Consulate and get their green cards. Just this simple step, would substantially reduce the number of undocumented immigrants in the US, making our communities and our country safer.
2. Relief for DACA recipients: Most DACA recipients entered the US when they were little and do not remember their country of birth. Although they can work and get their driver’s licenses, they are in limbo. They do not have lawful status so their future is uncertain because they could be removed at any time. They need to be provided a path to permanent resident status by allowing them to apply for a conditional visa that can be converted to LPR status.

HORRY COUNTY DEMOCRATIC PARTY