

## The US Citizenship Act

**What is the US Citizenship Act?** President Biden came to office promising an overhaul of our nation's immigration system, providing a path to citizenship for millions of immigrants living in the United States. The US Citizenship Act, introduced by Sen. Bob Menendez (D-NJ) in the Senate and Rep. Linda Sanchez (D-CA) in the House, is a sweeping immigration bill aimed at achieving a more equitable and just immigration system.

**What is in the legislation?** Among other provisions, this bill would:

- **Create a path to citizenship:** This bill would allow undocumented individuals to apply for temporary legal status after which, in five years they would be eligible for a green card. Immigrants with TPS (Temporary Protective Status), Dreamers, and migrant farmworkers would immediately be eligible for green cards if they meet specified criteria. After three additional years, all green card holders who pass background checks and show English proficiency can apply for citizenship. The bill also promotes immigrant and refugee integration along with new funding.
- **Restrict benefits to immigrants:** Immigrants on the path to citizenship would have to wait five years before being eligible for Affordable Care Act subsidies and ten years for Medicaid and SNAP eligibility. The bill allows DACA recipients and TPS and migrant farmworkers who are either children or pregnant to access these benefits sooner.
- **Change immigration law language:** The bill changes the word "alien" to "noncitizen" in US immigration laws.
- **Expedite family reunification:** The bill reforms family-based immigration by eliminating lengthy wait times, clearing backlogs, and increasing per-country visa caps. It explicitly includes permanent partnerships, eliminating discrimination against LGBTQ families. The bill would allow some people who were deported after 2017 to be reunited with their families in the US.
- **Eliminate the ban:** The bill incorporates the NO BAN Act that prohibits discrimination based on religion and limits the ability of future presidents to invoke such bans.
- **Protect workers:** The bill has various protections for migrant and seasonal workers by increasing penalties for employers who violate labor laws. It protects victims of workplace retaliation from deportation.
- **Fund border controls:** The bill includes funding to beef up technology at the border to more efficiently process asylum claims while boosting enforcement of the southern border.
- **Address root causes:** The bill attempts to address root causes of regional migration by increasing aid to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras and creating designated processing centers in Central America to register and process people for lawful migration avenues to the US or other partner countries.

- **Support asylum seekers:** The bill eliminates the one-year deadline for filing asylum claims and raises the cap on U Visas from 10,000 to 30,000.

**Why do we need this legislation?** Millions of undocumented immigrants make their home in the US, playing an important role in our economy. In recent years, anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies have pushed undocumented immigrants further into the shadows, fearing deportation that would tear their families apart. This bill would move us closer to a more just and humane immigration system and a more inclusive nation. It would undo some of the cruel and unjust policies that separated families and mistreated young immigrants and others seeking asylum. Unfortunately, while providing a path to citizenship, the bill would bar those awaiting citizenship—some for up to ten years—from accessing important safety-net benefits such as health care.

**What is the status of this bill?** The bill has been introduced in both chambers of Congress. In addition, the Dream and Promise Act, H.R. 6, has been introduced to specifically provide a path to citizenship for minors who were under 18 when they entered the US. The Senate companion bill is the Dream Act of 2021, S. 264.

**Why does the Workers Circle support this bill?** The Workers Circle, founded by Eastern European immigrants in 1900, understands and values the continuing contributions of immigrants to all aspects of life in the United States. With no path to citizenship, many immigrants—undocumented and otherwise—are forced to live and work as a permanent underclass. During the pandemic and throughout history, immigrant workers have been essential to the economic life of our communities as well as to our health and well-being. While the U.S. Citizenship Act is an important step forward in reforming our immigration system, we are advocating to ensure that immigrants awaiting citizenship be permitted to access health and other safety net benefits.