

August 25, 2014

To the Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to support your commitment to reform America's broken immigration policy. We understand and share your frustration that Congress has not acted. We applaud your promise to do your job to fix as much as you can administratively, because they have not acted.

While there are many very specific reforms each of our organizations may ask for, this letter focuses on just one proposal that would benefit all whom we represent. And it is central to everything that you might do because it is focused on making our legal immigration system more readily accessible to the millions waiting in line to immigrate. We ask that you eliminate or at least reduce the egregious backlogs for *legal* immigration by adopting the better rule of counting only principals against the limits set by the Immigration Act of 1990.

We believe that the theme for the package of changes you undertake administratively should be focused on opening the legal immigration system for more to benefit. This includes finding ways for those who are undocumented to participate. This will take further steps beyond the "principals only" change we propose through waiver reform, but without that change it cannot happen at all.

We are certain that the law on this point is ambiguous in its legislative language and history, an ambiguity never resolved by administrative regulation. And this permits the Secretary of Homeland Security to resolve the ambiguity now by changing the current practice of counting dependents. But the request we are making of you is not just a legal argument. It is a plea that you take what works in our system—legal immigrant sponsorship by employer and families—and speed up access to the many waiting in line. This is a policy choice in keeping with everything you have said and done as President in support of immigration reform.

When you make the policy choice to make this change, we are confident that Secretary Johnson will have the tools to make it into a regulation. The key point is that the practice of counting spouses and children against the immigration limits is a huge contributor to backlogs for legal immigration, taking up half or more of both family and employment limits. This unnecessary and counterproductive policy is a major driver for unauthorized immigration, as families and workers alike often choose not to wait for promised visas to arrive. The *minimum* wait for a U.S. citizen's son or daughter is now 8 to 11 years—and up to 21 from Mexico and the Philippines. High-skilled employees from India must still wait more than ten years in temporary status for their green cards. These delays serve no national interest. Promising immigration without delivering it for decades makes no sense.

You have the authority to change this wholly counterproductive policy. It won't solve everything. It will still be necessary to provide other relief to rescue those who are stranded by the shipwreck of U.S. immigration policy. Such changes are critical, even vital. You will continue to hear from us about them.

But this one reform – counting principals only – helps everyone. It would significantly accelerate family unification, eliminate the backlogs for employment-based green cards, and reduce the pressure for unauthorized immigration. Yet it would not increase legal immigration by a single person, because every beneficiary is already eligible for a green card. It simply dramatically reduces the wait.

That is why we are asking that you seize this opportunity to fix what is broken in our immigration system. We will not say that it is your last opportunity to fulfill your longstanding promise. But given the realities of the Congress which we have seen all too clearly, it is certainly your best chance.

We appreciate your courage and leadership and look forward to working with you on these matters.

Sincerely,

The Institute of Electrical and
Electronics Engineers-USA

Society for Human Resources
Management

Semiconductor Industry Association

AMN Healthcare

O'Grady Peyton International

Council for Global Immigration

LULAC – the League of United Latin
American Citizens

MALDEF – the Mexican American
Legal Defense and Education Fund

American Families United

Immigrants List

Immigrant Legal Resource Center

The Bridge Project

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