



Statement for the Record of

NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

For Senate Judiciary Committee,
Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship

Hearing on

The Essential Role of Immigrant Workers in America

Wednesday, May 12, 2021

NETWORK educates, organizes, and lobbies for social and economic transformation. We are rooted in Catholic Social Justice and open to all who share our passion. We value women's leadership, welcome secular and religious backgrounds, affirm LGBTQ+ identities, and engage in ongoing racial justice work.

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NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice is a national organization of more than 90,000 social justice advocates across the United States inspired by Catholic Sisters. NETWORK educates, organizes, and lobbies for social and economic transformation through federal policies.

NETWORK is pleased to submit this statement to the Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship of the Senate Judiciary Committee for the hearing - 'The Essential Role of Immigrant Workers in America.' We appreciate the subcommittee conducting this important hearing.

NETWORK believes in the dignity of all people and has advocated for bold immigration reforms for the past 50 years. Catholic Social Justice teaches that all people are made in the image and likeness of God and so possess an equal and inalienable worth. Because of this essential dignity, each person has a right to what is necessary to reach her or his full potential as intended by God.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the weaknesses of our immigration system. [Five and a half million undocumented immigrants are essential workers](#), including 425,000 who are healthcare workers. Immigrants have always been at the heart of our national community and identity, but this pandemic has demonstrated that without immigrants, we cannot survive. For example, 1.7 million undocumented workers are essential to our food supply. Undocumented individuals have always been essential in this country and the pandemic has only amplified that truth. Undocumented immigrants can no longer be defined by their legal status. They are members of our communities. They have families of their own. They are equal.

The United States has often highlighted the contributions of essential workers and expressed gratitude to them throughout these painful 14 months. However, undocumented individuals are frequently excluded from that gratitude, when it comes to action. They were excluded with the distribution of [stimulus checks](#).

Essential workers have faced the most significant risks amid the pandemic. And we know that countless immigrant members of our congregations, places of worship, and communities have worked throughout the pandemic as essential workers, providing the basic goods and critical services which have helped us all make it through this terrible season.

One such example is Jose.¹ Jose showed early promise as a soccer player in Ciudad Juarez. However, at the age of 14 he had to leave all that behind, as he and his family had to flee the violence in the city of his birth. Starting a new life in the U.S. was not easy, Jose said, "the start of a new life in a foreign country was a terrifying thought for me. Learning a new language, going to

¹ Name changed for his protection.

a new school and making new friends frightened me.” Despite all of this Jose, completed his High School and won a full athletic scholarship to a community college in Chicago. He earned his Associate's Degree in Computer Information Systems. After that he was able to transfer to a private four year university, where he had to pay a small percent of the tuition. His parents made it happen and he received his Bachelor's Degree in Computer Information Systems. He was the first in his family to graduate.

He felt discouraged while he was earning his degree, worrying about his future because he was still undocumented. He feels fortunate that it was during this time he was approved for DACA . “This moment is memorable for me because it is when my life and my family’s life changed completely. DACA has allowed me to accomplish so much in my life and I'm very grateful for it,” said Jose. DACA allowed him to work as the Web Master and Graphic Designer as well as obtained his Master’s Degree in Management. He bought a house for his parents. His siblings have also graduated from College. He is working on starting his own business – a Creative Studio with the mission of assisting small and medium sized business improve their digital presence and brand development. He is a member of, and also works for, the Archdiocese of Chicago.

It is Jose and all of the people like Jose that make this country vibrant. This is what Jose has achieved when he has been able to plan his life for two years at a time, imagine what he could do if he had the security of living his life in the United States. Jose cannot continue to live his life in two year increments. The United States should be proud to give him citizenship now.

As a country, we have always known that undocumented workers are the backbone of our society. Over 60 top economists recently made that case in a letter urging the Biden administration to include a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants as part of COVID-19 relief, pointing that such a policy would increase prosperity and reduce poverty for all Americans.

And yet, we as a people have treated our immigrant "essential" workers as expendable, as exploitable—extracting their labor while disregarding their humanity. We have excluded them from full citizenship and denied them the full fruits of their contributions to our economy and community life. People do not lose their dignity or their humanity simply because they lack the correct paperwork. We have chosen, to exclude and discriminate against people for their lack of paperwork or based on interactions with our nation’s racist criminal justice system.

Essential immigrant workers have been, and will continue to be, key to our communities' health and prosperity during the healing of our nation from the pandemic and into the future. Immigrants, including 131,000 people with TPS and 200,000 people with DACA, are serving on the frontlines—despite their families and communities receiving little or no relief themselves.

One important step we can take in the coming weeks is to recognize undocumented immigrants who are essential workers and their families for the gifts they bring into their communities, their resiliency, and their contributions to our society with a roadmap to citizenship. We must not

exclude a section of our society simply because of a lack of paperwork, provide no pathway to be able to obtain the paperwork , or punish them twice for having prior contact with a racist and biased criminal legal system.

The time is now for Congress to affirm the human dignity of all people living in the United States by providing a pathway to citizenship to all immigrant workers.