



January 4, 2024

The Honorable Maria Salazar
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Veronica Escobar
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representatives Salazar and Escobar:

As the second session of the 118th Congress opens, on behalf of the American Seniors Housing Association (ASHA), I want to recommit our support for H.R. 3599, Dignity for Immigrants while Guarding our Nation to Ignite and Deliver the American Dream Act of 2023, the DIGNIDAD (Dignity) Act of 2023. This bill would go a long way to addressing the workforce shortage in the long-term care industry, which will only get worse as the population ages. Among other things, this legislation updates the legal immigration process, provides a path to citizenship for Dreamers, individuals with Temporary Protected Status and undocumented immigrants, and provides the resources needed to secure our borders. We understand the need to couple border security with legal immigration reform and support efforts to address both challenges and look forward to working with you to advance this critical legislation.

The population is aging. The Census Bureau estimates that 21 percent of Americans will be 65 or older by 2030, putting an enormous burden on our already strained health-care workforce. People are living longer and have more chronic conditions. They will need care and more of it. The long-term care workforce is shrinking. These facts cannot be ignored much longer.

This senior living industry cares for our most vulnerable Americans including a large percentage of our nation's veterans and those living with Alzheimer's in communities across the country. The 85 and older veterans population in need of supportive care will triple in the next twenty years. And without a cure or reliable treatment for Alzheimer's, the number of people living with that disease is projected to grow to 12.7 million by 2050. Today 6.7 million older adults live with Alzheimer's disease.

Without an adequate and steady supply of workers such as caregivers, nurses, housekeepers, dining staff, medical technicians, and others, it becomes increasingly difficult to serve not only the current resident population but the growing demand in the years ahead. With hundreds of thousands of jobs lost in our industry since the pandemic; 8 million unfilled jobs today in this country; and the astonishing demand projections for workers in the long-term care sector due to the aging demographics; it is time to act on immigration reform and therefore we applaud your efforts. We need workers today and we will need more workers tomorrow. Congress must recognize this need and ensure older Americans will have care options available when they need it. Action must be taken now to reform our immigration system and the Dignity Act of 2023 creates the vehicle for making meaningful and much needed changes.

As you continue your work to make the Dignity Act a reality, please consider some specific needs of the senior living industry. Current law provides no long-term, year-round worker visas for essential front-line workers. Caregivers are not seasonal, do not meet a one-time need, and are not highly skilled positions. Yet these positions are key to providing compassionate and reliable supportive care to older adults.

We need a workable visa program for this category of workers. We also support an expedited worker authorization process for asylees. These people are currently in this country but without the ability to work and must wait months or years to obtain a work permit. They can be provided with jobs today in our communities. This must be addressed sooner than later.

Your legislation is intended to address many of the workforce shortage challenges we are experiencing today. Again, we express our sincere appreciation and applaud your leadership in taking on this monumental but much needed work. Please reach out to Jeanne McGlynn Delgado, ASHA VP of Government Affairs with questions at jeanne@ashaliving.org. We look forward to working with your offices in the weeks and months ahead.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "David Schless". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "David" being more prominent than the last name "Schless".

David Schless

President & CEO