



January 4, 2024

The Honorable Lloyd Smucker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Henry Cuellar
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representatives Smucker and Cuellar

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. 3734, The Essential Workers for Economic Advancement Act. 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. This bipartisan bill offers a commonsense approach to addressing the workforce shortage by creating a new visa category for essential workers, i.e., those who can fill positions that are non-farmwork, non-seasonal and do not require a college degree. This is especially important for the senior living industry because the current system lacks a visa category for positions such as caregivers, nursing assistants, housekeepers, dining staff and more. As defined, this visa will be available for many of these essential and in demand positions. The bill includes appropriate checks and balances to ensure program integrity and ongoing study requirements to assess impact on wages, employment, economic growth, use of benefits and government services, etc.

As you know, 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. 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.

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. H.R. 3734 addresses these shortfalls in the immigration system.

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.

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".

David Schless

President & CEO