

POLICY BRIEF

Persistent Labor Shortages Demands Smart Immigration Reform

ASHA ACTION REQUEST:

We urge Congress and the Administration to enact smart immigration reforms to support today's senior living workforce and ensure a future pipeline of workers are available to meet the nation's demands for care, including policies that: **1)** create a worker visa program for long term care essential and in-demand positions; and **2)** accelerate the worker authorization process for migrants seeking asylum in the U.S.

5 REASONS TO ADVANCE IMMIGRATION POLICIES

1

The Workforce Shortage in Senior Living and the Broader Long Term Care Sector is Real.

The pandemic exacerbated an already challenged environment and recovery has been slow while the need for care is great. While the front-line workers stepped up as "heroes" in confronting the health care crisis and serving their residents compassionately and with courage, the consequences were severe relative to the downsizing of the workforce. It is estimated that the industry lost 250,000 jobs during the pandemic and is slowly working to regain their pre-COVID levels, but that goal may be out of reach unless action is taken. From 2021 to 2031, the industry will have nearly 1.2 million job openings. This includes new jobs (88,400), jobs open due to workers transfer to other occupations (538,100) and job openings due to workers leaving labor force (561,100). (PHI and BLS)

2

The Population is Aging.

Lower birthrates and longer life expectancies will create a scenario where in 2034, more than half the population will be over 65 than those under 18. (Census Bureau) This phenomenon impacts everything: employment, consumption, economic growth, retirement savings, the already stressed health care system and how we care for our older population in need of long-term care. As 10,000 people turn 65 every day and 70% of them are expected to need some level of long-term care at some point, both at home and in the community, a steady supply of workers is critical to ensuring the ability to age with dignity.

3

The Number of People Suffering from Alzheimer's Disease is Staggering and on the Rise.

Over 6 million people suffer from Alzheimer's Disease in this country and by 2025, the number is projected to reach 7.2 million— a 20% increase. A significant percentage of them require specialized care delivered in a residential community, in a setting that promotes independence and dignity. Without adequate levels of staffing, these communities will simply not be able to serve this population. While most of these people receive care from family members and friends, approximately 40% of residents in senior living suffer from Alzheimer's or related dementia.

4

Immigrants Are Crucial to the Overall Health Care System.

Immigrants are a significant and growing part of the American labor force. Foreign-born workers make up 17% of the workforce and undocumented workers comprise approximately 4.4%. Nearly 2.8 million immigrants were employed as health-care workers in 2021, accounting for more than 18 percent of the 15.2 million people in the United States in a health-care occupation. The foreign born were especially over-represented among certain health-care occupations such as physicians and surgeons (26 percent) as well as home health aides (almost 40 percent). Approximately 1.6 million immigrants were working as doctors, registered nurses, dentists, pharmacists, or dental hygienists. (Migration Policy)

5

Immigration Creates Economic Stability.

Without significant changes to shore up the Social Security program, beneficiaries would incur a 23% across-the-board benefit cut in 2033, when the retirement fund becomes insolvent. That would equate to \$17,400 annual benefits cut for a typical newly retired dual-income couple and would contribute to a sharp rise in poverty among older adults, especially those in need of long-term care services and supports. Immigrants to the United States tend to be of working age on arrival, which means they can begin contributing to the Social Security system as soon as they begin working. Immigrants also tend to consume fewer benefits than the native-born population, including fewer Social Security benefits. These two factors make increased immigration a powerful policy tool in the effort to maintain the Social Security program. (Bi-partisan policy)

ASHA SUPPORTED LEGISLATION:

There are more than 20 nonimmigrant visa categories for people traveling and working in the U.S. but none of them are suited for the caregiver, dietary aid, med tech and other essential and in demand positions in the long-term care industry. To help meet the need for caregivers and other essential workers in the senior living and long-term care industry, ASHA supports the following legislative proposals in the 118th Congress:

▼ **The Essential Workers for Economic Advancement Act – (H.R.3734)**

Sponsors: Rep. Smucker (R-PA), Rep. Cuellar (D-TX). This bipartisan bill offers 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 including caregivers, housekeepers, dining staff.

▼ **Dignity for Immigrants while Guarding our Nation to Ignite and Deliver the American Dream Act of 2023 (DIGNITY Act) – (H.R. 3599)**

Sponsors: Rep. Salazar (R-FL), Rep. Escobar (D-TX). This bill consists of four core principles: **(1)** stopping illegal immigration; **(2)** providing a dignified solution for undocumented immigrants living in America; **(3)** strengthening the American workforce and economy; and **(4)** ensuring the United States remains prosperous and competitive in the future.

▼ **Asylum Seeker Work Authorization Act of 2023 – (S. 255 / H.R. 1325)**

Sponsors: Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME), Sen. Sinema (I-AZ) and Sen. King (I-ME) and Rep. Pingree (D-ME). This legislation allows individuals seeking asylum at ports of entry to be eligible for work authorizations starting 30 days after they apply for asylum (a reduction from the current 180 days), provided their applications are not frivolous; they are not detained; and their identities have been verified, with their names run through the federal government's terrorist watch lists. By encouraging asylum seekers to enter the country through official ports of entry, this legislation would help create a more orderly asylum application process.

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