

A Plea from America's Scholars

It Is Time For Congress To Take Action And Reform Our Nation's Immigration Laws: A Plea From America's Scholars

May 1, 2013

The history of America is a history of immigration. Starting with our country's founding by idealistic newcomers, the waves of immigrants who settled in the United States have continuously added to our culture and national identity. However, America's immigration system has become out of step with the social and economic needs of our nation and, therefore, we believe policies must change. As university professors from across the United States, we believe that reforming our immigration laws is both the right thing to do and is in our nation's best interests. As the community responsible for educating the next generation of Americans, we see the harm that a broken immigration system has had on our students and their families.

For immigrant students who have studied and grown up in the U.S., we need to ensure that they have the opportunities to continue their education and settle into their careers in the U.S. Similarly, immigrants with credentials and skills already living in the U.S. should have the opportunity to practice their professions here.

The positive effects that immigrant students have on our education system are manifold. Immigrant students contribute to the diversity of our classrooms, which in turn has a positive impact on all students. Diversity has been shown to be positively associated with students' cognitive development, satisfaction with their educational experience, and leadership skills.

We are educating these students in the U.S., but the broken immigration system makes it extremely difficult for students to stay and build a life in this country and for U.S. employers to hire them. Immigration reform needs to address these shortcomings. Furthermore, as immigrants are highly likely to start businesses and contribute to innovation at a time when the U.S. economy needs it most, we must ensure that the opportunities for business start-ups and innovative collaboration within the United States are not lost.

More than the contributions that immigrants make through their research and entrepreneurship, they are members of our communities. Congress' failure to pass immigration reform is contributing to the creation of a permanent underclass of marginalized individuals surviving in the shadows of society and facing overwhelming economic and social burdens. It is especially troubling that millions of undocumented children who would have benefited from the DREAM Act - American in spirit but not in law - are now enrolled in U.S. schools, but will not be able to lawfully gain employment at the end of their education.

And increasingly, immigrants are living in mixed-status families, or households where some family members are undocumented, some are citizens, while others immigrated legally. And a decade of enforcement-only immigration policies has separated families and communities through deportation. Our immigrant students are likely to have family members who are undocumented or have been deported, and the deportations of family and community members have lasting consequences for them. Legal, secure families and communities will increase the persistence, graduation rates, and success of students from immigrant and post-immigrant backgrounds. There will be an impressive payoff to this investment in the future of our nation.

With support from all sides, the signs are clear that now is the time for Congress to act on immigration reform. The U.S. is operating with a broken immigration system that is limiting the potential of thousands of immigrant students and blocking millions more immigrants from being able

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to achieve citizenship in a country they already call home. The current system is damaging to individuals, families, communities, and the economy. We think America is better than this. It is time for Congress to fix this upside-down moral universe and pass comprehensive immigration reform that includes a clear, earned path to citizenship. It is time for Congress to take action and reform our nation's immigration laws to match our 21st century world.

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