



STATE OF WASHINGTON  
OFFICE OF GOVERNOR JAY INSLEE

July 2, 2021

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of The House  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, and Leader McCarthy:

I write to reaffirm my unequivocal and longstanding support for comprehensive immigration reform. With the grip of the pandemic easing and new federal leadership in place, now is the time to act, to finally bring hope and peace of mind to millions.

The United States is meant to be a welcoming nation, built on the promise of opportunity. Yet we offer no chance of permanency for so many who we call friends, neighbors, and coworkers. We deny this, all the while reaping the benefits of their contributions to our economy, our tax revenues, our culture, and our well-being. In the face of discrimination, exploitation, the ever-present threat of deportation, and now, the risk of a deadly virus, immigrants have served as healthcare workers, farm laborers, and childcare providers, valiantly underpinning our essential workforce.

Nearly 40 years ago, the United States Supreme Court handed down its opinion in *Plyler v. Doe*, warning of “the specter of a permanent caste of undocumented [individuals], encouraged by some to remain here as a source of cheap labor, but nevertheless denied the benefits that our society makes available to citizens and lawful residents.”<sup>1</sup> The court then observed that “the existence of such an underclass presents most difficult problems for a Nation that prides itself on adherence to principles of equality under law.” Since *Plyler*, Congress has enacted the Immigration Reform and Control Act and the Illegal Immigrant Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act; presidents have issued a series of executive orders; and federal agencies have produced volumes of administrative rules. Some actions were progressive, others regressive; collectively, they have failed to adequately address one of the most pressing matters facing our country today.

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<sup>1</sup> *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202, 218-19 (1982).

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The state of Washington is home to one million first-generation immigrants, more than 250,000 of whom have no clear path to temporary or permanent residency, let alone citizenship. I have met with many of these individuals, hearing their stories of the precarious circumstances in their home countries and the perilous journey to our shores, all to seek a better life in a country offering stability and opportunity.

Regrettably, soon after arrival, they find themselves living in the shadow of American society, underrepresented and underserved. Categorically excluded from nearly all social programs, and unable to safely assert their civil rights, the stories of immigrants today are strikingly similar to those acknowledged by the Supreme Court so many years ago. Their request today is as it was then, to have the same access to our democracy as those fortunate enough to be born here and those with the time and resources to navigate our tangled immigration laws.

Even without a comprehensive approach to reform at the federal level, I have remained steadfast in my desire to provide equal access to all those who live here, ever building upon Washington's long history as a welcoming state. To that end, I have signed legislation providing in-state tuition and college assistance without regard to immigration status; a series of bills designed to allay the fear of interacting with state and local government officials, and to allow safe access to our courts; and most recently, I have made significant investments in COVID-19 relief for immigrants. But no matter how much our state works to combat inequality, we cannot confer work authorization, permanent residency, or citizenship upon our residents. We need Congress to do so, to do so quickly, and to do so using any legislative means necessary, including budget reconciliation.

Comprehensive immigration reform is long overdue. I am aware of no eventuality where the international flow of migrants wanes, amid unprecedented rates of global migration driven by violence, oppression, and climate change. For these reasons, I urge you to act expeditiously to codify enduring and meaningful improvements to our country's immigration system.

Very truly yours,



Jay Inslee  
Governor

CC: Senator Patty Murray  
Senator Maria Cantwell  
Representative Adam Smith  
Representative Rick Larsen  
Representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers  
Representative Jamie Herrera Beutler  
Representative Suzan DelBene  
Representative Derek Kilmer  
Representative Dan Newhouse  
Representative Pramila Jayapal  
Representative Kim Schrier  
Representative Marilyn Strickland