



Representing California's Catholic
Health Systems and Hospitals



August 11, 2022

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
United States Senate
331 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Alex Padilla
United States Senate
112 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Feinstein and Padilla

On behalf California's Catholic hospitals, the Alliance of Catholic Health and members Dignity Health (CommonSpirit Health) and Providence, we write today to respectfully urge your prompt enactment of two essential Federal immigration reform measures. One is the Dream Act, which would end legal uncertainty and make *Dreamers* eligible to apply immediately for U.S. permanent residency and eventually for citizenship. The second is the Farm Workforce Modernization Act, which would establish a "Certified Agricultural Worker" (CAW) status; and modernize the H-2A temporary worker visa program – including providing the ability for a CAW immigrant and dependents to apply for lawful permanent resident status after meeting various requirements. We view these as companion measures that complement and re-enforce one another, and advocate for the passage of both.

We are calling upon you because caring for America's immigrant population is an indelible part of our ministry and our legacy. The women religious congregations, who established hospitals, cared for all as their "neighbors" – a huge share of those were "newcomers" to this country. It didn't matter then – and we believe it shouldn't matter now.

This healing mission to care for all – regardless of immigration status or ability to pay – extends today in the dedication of Catholic health systems and Catholic-affiliated hospitals working to improve the health and well-being of immigrant communities. An essential part of California's (and the nation's) health care safety net, Catholic providers work closely with a wide range of organizations to build common ground in support of all immigrant communities, acting in solidarity with migrants, refugees, asylees and victims of human trafficking.

Nearly 11 million immigrants live in California, representing more than a quarter of the state's population. More than two million have undocumented status. It is well documented that this population disproportionately endures socio-economic disparities that affect health status: immigrant communities are more likely to delay or forego medical treatment.

Limited transportation options and a lack of brick-and-mortar facility access or broadband connectivity, impair rural access to health care and other services. California farming communities – particularly laborers and people of color – experience health disparities, including greater risk of COVID-19 exposure, morbidity and mortality.

Simply put, fear of apprehension and possible deportation, in and of themselves, are tell-tale predictors of undocumented immigrants' inability to access quality health care. Passage of these two pieces of legislation will mark a major step forward in these persons gaining access to the care they've earned and deserve.

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). The 2012 DACA Program's present state of legal uncertainty does a grave disservice to so many thousands of "Dreamers" who came to this country seeking a safe haven from violence; shelter and food security, a good education, and a chance to earn a decent living wage. In improving their own lives, they have made America a better place for all of us. Passage of the Dream Act would go a long way toward providing a place they can truly and finally call home.

Dreamers Are Key Members of Today's Health Workforce. Tens of thousands of *Dreamers* today are essential health care workers; and many of them, the heroes who helped all of us survive the COVID pandemic. Drawing on 2018 American Community Survey Census data, CMS estimated that over 43,000 DACA recipients work in the health care and social assistance industries, including 10,300 in hospitals and 2,000 in nursing care facilities – numbers that are likely considerably higher today.

Today, California – like many states – faces a serious and worsening shortage of health care professionals – particularly dire in chronically underserved communities. The challenge is three-fold: Retirements are accelerating, while next-gen replacements are looking to careers elsewhere; our medically "underserved" communities today have little reason for hope, and greater cause for concern; and in terms of diversity, the national provider shortage is soon likely to worsen. **For our ability to treat every patient, it is absolutely essential that we make every qualified current and prospective *Dreamer* health care worker feel at home here – and eager to stay here.**

Farm Workforce Modernization Act. America's farmworkers are vital to the well-being of America. Many of these essential workers are immigrants. Most do not receive health coverage from their employees, nor qualify for Medicaid or other programs. While California leads the nation in expanding access to coverage for undocumented individuals, this is not the case in every state. And though access is improving in our state, many still fear being identified as undocumented and subject to deportation. The same applies to their families. Yet, they contribute to our welfare and prosperity no less than anyone else. **Now is the time to erase health inequities that result, *per se*, from the "undocumented" status of an American farmworker family.** This legislation would mark a vital step forward.

Addressing Food Insecurity. A major collateral benefit of the Workforce Act would be to help provide greater food security for every American family. On average, one out of every five Californians – about eight million people – currently struggle with food insecurity, with greater levels of hunger experienced by Black, Latino and Indigenous families. Often, families experiencing food insecurity must choose between food, medical care and other basic necessities. Food insecurity can lead to Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and obesity.

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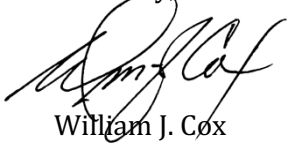
Children at risk of hunger are more likely to be in poor health, as well as struggle in school and other social situations. Family members in food-insecure households are also more likely to struggle with psychological and behavioral health issues.

The Farm Workforce Modernization Act would significantly address this challenge by allowing more farmers to hire temporary workers year-round. As with so many other sectors of the economy, the farmworker shortage is acute, and affecting both food supply and cost.

Currently, year-round employers cannot use the H-2A temporary visa utilized by seasonal employers. It would also satisfy some goals for labor rights advocates by providing a pathway to legalization for workers who show a dedicated history of farm work. Today's antiquated H-2A visa program is not costing U.S. citizen farmworker jobs – but it is a contributing factor to the breaking American family food budget.

For all the reasons stated above, we urge you to resolve any remaining differences and enable prompt passage of these two vital pieces of legislation.

Sincerely,



William J. Cox
President and CEO
Alliance of Catholic Health Care

The Alliance of Catholic Health Care represents California's Catholic health care systems. Together, our health systems operate 50 acute care hospitals, which represent nearly 15% of all hospitals and over 16% of the hospital beds in California.