



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

TODD GLORIA

MAYOR

January 22, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House

The Honorable Kamala Harris
Vice President of the United States
The White House

Dear President Biden and Vice President Harris:

I write to you today as the new Mayor of San Diego, California, America's largest border city and home to just over 360,000 immigrants. Our City's success has long been rooted in a welcoming immigration system - one that values dignity, belonging, and hard work. As your administration embarks upon the critical mission of fixing America's broken immigration system and undoing the harmful actions of the past four years please consider me a willing partner.

As a mayor I see firsthand how immigrants, who make up a quarter of San Diego's population, are part of the beautiful mosaic that is my City. But I also see firsthand how decisions made at the federal level can rip families apart, send people into the shadows, and create distrust within communities. As you work with Congress on the passage of a comprehensive immigration package, I urge you to work directly with Mayors from across the country to not only help pass legislation but help restore trust within our immigrant communities. We hope that you will heed our call. America's cities and our nation will be stronger for it.

As you work on a comprehensive immigration reform package, I ask you to consider the following provisions, which are important to the City of San Diego and its 1.41 million residents:

- 1. Full Path to Legalization:** Immigration reform must create a welcoming roadmap to citizenship for the 11.4 million undocumented people that call America home. In the midst and immediate aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. This package should take swift action to provide an earned path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who are employed as essential workers. This should also include protections for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients and a path to citizenship, given that there are approximately 30,000 Dreamers are working as healthcare workers, and overall 200,000 Dreamers work in essential sectors at the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2. Give Cities a Broader Role in the Immigration Process:** As the economic engines of the country, cities have enacted policies to attract and retain immigrants, but are unable to petition

for new immigrant workers to address unmet needs. Congress should create a new Visa program that would allow cities to attract additional immigrants to meet their most outstanding economic and human capital needs.

3. Rebuild Community Trust: The continued deterioration of trust in immigrant communities must be addressed in any comprehensive immigration package. The federal government should look to cities, like San Diego, to leverage innovative ideas to combat this trust gap. Examples like the “*Safe and Connected Communities*” section of the *Welcoming San Diego Strategic Plan* on immigrant integration which promotes trust between San Diego law enforcement and the immigrant communities in our region should be realized. Any immigration reform package should strengthen these innovative local initiatives by creating a new federal flexible discretionary grant program to pilot community-based strategies to build back trust within immigrant communities.

4. End Family Separation at the Border: We should immediately end the policy of family separation and take swift action to reunite families, including families that may have been separated by deportation.

5. Rescind the Travel and Immigration Bans: We should immediately reverse the travel and immigration bans put in place by the previous administration.

6. Protect Our Veterans from Deportation: Those who have served our country honorably should never face deportation, period. Any reform package should protect our veterans and their families who have served their country but are nonetheless in deportation proceedings due to their immigration status.

7. Reverse the Harmful Public Charge Rule: We should immediately reverse the prior administration’s public charge rule. This rule has had an alarming impact on immigrants seeking healthcare and other federal benefits out of fear that receiving such services could exclude them from the immigration process or make them deportable – which has complicated efforts to respond to COVID-19.

8. Restore Fairness to the U.S. Asylum Process: We should reverse the prior administration’s policies and reaffirm protections for individuals fleeing gang and domestic violence, while also increasing the number of immigration court judges and asylum officers to reduce the case backlog. Some of the policies that the new administration must consider reversing include the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) sometimes referred to as the “Remain in Mexico” policy, “metering” at the border, and current restrictions on access to “credible fear” interviews. We should also consider keeping cases with positive credible-fear findings within the Asylum Division and reinstating the “safe release” policy providing travel assistance to asylum seekers to reach the destinations of their sponsor.

9. Restore the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Process: We should restore the U.S. Refugee Admissions program (USRAP), setting a floor of 125,000 new admissions for each upcoming fiscal year. In addition, we should reverse the 2019 executive order requiring states and localities to opt-in to additional refugee resettlement in their region or jurisdictions. Part of

restoring the USRAP also means making a commitment for continued funding for the country's resettlement agencies.

10. Boost Our Economic Recovery by Reforming the H-1B Visa System: As our communities look to build back better from COVID-19, the administration needs to address the shortage of high-skilled workers, while also protecting U.S. workers. We should reverse the H-1B and other nonimmigrant visa bans, and, together with Congress, should reform the H-1B visa system, raising the cap on H-1B visas while also implementing stronger wage and displacement protections for U.S. workers.

11. Reform the H-2B Visa Program: As our communities rebuild from COVID-19 it will be essential to rebuild our country's tourism economy. In order to do so, we should reform the H-2B visa system by increasing the cap and making H-2B visas portable to ensure our communities who depend on tourism to thrive can do so.

12. Increase Access and Pathways for Legal Migration: It is increasingly difficult and restrictive for people looking to immigrate to the U.S. to navigate our immigration system. To clear the pathways for legal migration to our country, we should have more accessible options for people to enter the country legally. This also includes additional guest worker programs that allow individuals to work in the U.S. with temporary or permanent permits in jobs that are essential to our economy.

13. Investing in the U.S Adjudication System: We should authorize and appropriate additional funding for the hiring of additional immigration judges and support personnel, modernizing the immigration filing system, and improving facilities and infrastructure.

14. Protect Temporary Protected Status (TPS) Holders: We should reverse the prior administration's attacks on TPS holders. In addition, the administration should provide all TPS holders with a path to permanent residency and citizenship.

15. Address our Medical Workforce Shortage: As we learned throughout the COVID-19 pandemic the shortage of healthcare workers is a real threat to our viability as a nation. We should include the bipartisan *Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act* in a COVID-19 relief bill or broader immigration package. This would allow more immigrant doctors and nurses to help not only with coronavirus health treatment and vaccine distribution, but also have our country prepared for future public health emergencies.

16. Eliminate the Secure Communities Program: It is essential we work to rebuild trust within immigrant communities, federal programs, like the Secure Communities program, which involve state and local police, and lead to pretextual arrests, undermine trust with local governments and law enforcement. We should include the elimination of the Secure Communities program and any other federal programs that unfairly target immigrant communities in any immigration reform package.

17. End Per Country Caps and Clear the USCIS Backlogs: More than 700,000 naturalization applications are currently awaiting review from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

(USCIS), which lacks the resources, staffing and leadership to process applications in a timely manner. We should end the per-country caps on employment and family-based visas and appropriate sufficient funding to clear the naturalization backlog and ensure timely processing.

18. End the Three- and Ten-Year Bars: Under U.S law immigrants living in the U.S. without authorization who qualify to apply for legal status must first leave the country for either three or ten years before they can legally gain entry. This arbitrary and draconian policy discourages eligible immigrants from pursuing legalization and results in more immigrants living in the U.S. illegally. We should eliminate the three- and ten-year bans to incentivize legal immigration.

19. Make Immigrant Detention a Last Resort: To reduce health risks and the high costs of detention, the administration should use detention as an avenue of absolute last resort by releasing immigrants who do not pose a security threat, such as families with children and employ alternatives to detention, such as electronic monitoring, to reduce health risks and the extremely high costs of detention. In addition, we should reverse the prior administration's executive order and provide incentives to communities that welcome and resettled refugees.

20. Increase Investment and Modernize U.S. Ports of Entry: America's ports of entry currently lack the resources and personnel necessary to handle the current security, economic and humanitarian demands placed on them. We should upgrade U.S. ports of entry, ensure adequate staffing, and complete the process of implementing an entry and exit system. Any immigration reform package should authorize and appropriate enhanced federal funding to ensure our ports of entry are more secure and able to facilitate robust economic movements.

21. Reform U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE): The prior administration's use of ICE has created long-lasting damage to immigrant community relations. State and local involvement in immigration enforcement has led to racial discrimination in policing practices and made our communities less safe by undermining community policing and intelligence gathering efforts. Maintaining the separation between local law enforcement operations and federal immigration enforcement is for the benefit of public safety. We are all less safe if our foreign-born residents are afraid to approach police out of fear for themselves or their loved ones who may not have documentation. We should reform ICE to ensure more oversight in ICE's activities, as well as provide additional resources for training and outreach.

I pledge to work with you and your team in this effort and to do whatever we can to assist you in seeing these provisions enacted into law. I cordially invite you to visit the City of San Diego and see firsthand how a City built on welcoming immigrants, binational cooperation, and community partnership can thrive.

Sincerely,



TODD GLORIA
Mayor
City of San Diego