

March 28, 2023

The Honorable Dave Joyce
Chairman
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Homeland Security
2006 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Henry Cuellar
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Homeland Security
2006 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Joyce and Ranking Member Cuellar:

On behalf of **UnidosUS**, I write to urge you to advance a Homeland Security FY2024 appropriations package that facilitates the integration and inclusion of long-term immigrants and aspiring Americans so they can contribute to their fullest potential.

UnidosUS is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that serves as the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization. Since 1968, we have challenged the social, economic, and political barriers that affect Latinos through our unique combination of expert research, advocacy, programs, and an Affiliate Network of nearly 300 community-based organizations across the United States and Puerto Rico. We believe in an America where economic, political, and social progress is a reality for all Latinos, and we collaborate across communities to achieve it.

Immigrants are integral members of our communities and their contributions to our workforce are essential to a robust economy. As has been **documented**, modernizing our immigration system is key to reducing inflation and promoting economic prosperity. However, our ability to fully incorporate and include immigrants in our society is hampered by government red tape; in August 2022, USCIS had a **net backlog** of about 5 million pending immigration benefits applications. This not only affects families but also businesses who need workers to fill open positions due to our labor shortage. This has also contributed to disturbing child labor violations that are reported in the news. That is why we urge you to:

- **Provide \$100 million for the Citizenship and Integration Grant Program.** This funding administered by local community-based organizations would be a civic, economic, and social investment that would benefit eligible lawful permanent residents (LPRs), their families and communities, and our nation. Facilitating the naturalization of LPRs would spur economic benefits, including higher rates of income, access to better-paying jobs, and increased homeownership rates. This would strengthen local housing markets and our tax base.

- **Provide \$800 million for the Shelter and Services Program, with \$50 million of that amount designated to construction and expansion of shelter facilities.** This request would assist state and local efforts to support migrants and migrant families who are encountered by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The Program pays for humanitarian costs incurred by localities and non-governmental organizations that assist screened and vetted noncitizens provisionally released from DHS custody pending the outcome of their immigration cases. Funds made available could be used for shelter, emergency assistance, and transportation costs, among other expenses. The grant program should also prioritize the funding of community-based organizations who are known and trusted by migrant communities and provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services. This ensures that localities have the funds needed to effectively support asylum seekers, unaccompanied minors, and other vulnerable immigrants while they await resolution of their immigration case.
- **Provide \$865 million to address immigration application backlogs.** USCIS has lengthy processing backlogs for immigration benefits such as work permits and naturalization that delay the full integration of legal immigrants into our economy and society. USCIS needs sufficient funding to reduce processing times and adjudicate immigrant benefit applications in a timely manner. We urge Congress to appropriate \$865 million to address the backlog of applications for work authorization, naturalization, adjustment of status, and other immigration benefits.
- **Make permanent the prioritization of serious criminals for immigration enforcement.** Barriers remain to establishing a smart and balanced enforcement strategy. In 2021, a federal judge **blocked the effect of a common sense memo** issued by Secretary Mayorkas meant to better target our enforcement resources toward immigrants who pose a national security, border security, or public safety threat. Congress should codify these enforcement priorities, as they have a clear connection to funding as a matter of public accountability.
- **Restrict the transfer and reprogramming authority for the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO).** Current law has long provided ICE the discretion to reprogram funds within appropriations and transfer funds between them, to the detriment of immigrants and the Latino community. We are deeply concerned about the agency's abuse and manipulation of this provision to increase its own resources for detention and enforcement, often despite congressional nonconcurrence. To prevent any future weaponization of ICE's enforcement capacity and to establish oversight and accountability, Congress should restrict the transfer and reprogramming authority for ICE's Enforcement and Removal Operations.
- **Establishment of a Newcomer Family Success program.** The establishment and funding of this grant program would support linguistically and culturally competent programs that provide immigrant parents and primary caregivers with the knowledge they need to

fully and successfully integrate into the United States. The program would help families navigate local systems and develop digital literacy and independent learning skills and would develop strategies for supporting children's school readiness and ongoing school success and family integration success plans, which will serve as on-ramps to other local resources and programming. Eligible grant applicants would include partnerships that could comprise state and local government entities, culturally competent community organizations, school districts, early childhood systems, adult education providers, and businesses/trade associations.

I urge you, as leaders of the House Appropriations Subcommittee with jurisdiction over immigration funding, to advance a DHS Subcommittee FY2024 appropriations bill that ensures a more humane, economically empowering, and modernized immigration system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eric Rodriguez', with a stylized, flowing script.

Eric Rodriguez
Senior Vice President
Policy and Advocacy
UnidosUS