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Statement for the Record

Submitted to the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary

On Full Committee Hearing Titled:

"How Mass Deportations Will Separate American Families, Harm Our Armed Forces, and Devastate Our Economy"

Submitted by:
Janet Murguía
President and CEO
UnidosUS
Raul Yzaguirre Building
1126 16th Street NW, Suite 600
Washington, DC 20036-4845

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Introduction

UnidosUS is the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization.[i] Since 1968, we have worked to break down social, economic, and political barriers affecting Latinos through expert research, policy advocacy, programs, and an Affiliate Network of more than 300 community-based organizations across 200 congressional districts in the United States and Puerto Rico.[ii] Our network provides vital services such as education, health care, immigration support, housing assistance, workforce development, free tax preparation, and other services to millions of Latinos in the United States each year. 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.

We appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony about the far-reaching harms of mass deportations. Our deep ties to communities nationwide have enabled us to document the hardships and successes of vulnerable immigrant populations, including long-residing undocumented individuals like Dreamers, whose contributions strengthen our economy, cultural vitality, and collective future. However, Congress's failure to enact legislation offering permanent protections reinforces their vulnerability. This experience underpins our testimony today.

For over four decades, UnidosUS has advocated for policies that strengthen the nation and enable aspiring Americans, including long-residing undocumented individuals, to build their lives in this country. We have played a role in every congressional debate on immigration for decades, including in shaping the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986[iii] and in advocating for the establishment of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program in 2012.[iv] Our extensive research on immigration has, among other things, highlighted the essential role of undocumented workers in the nation's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic[v] and the devastating harms that hardline enforcement actions impose on U.S. citizen children in mixed-status families[vi] and our economy.[vii]

UnidosUS's immigration expertise and policy and advocacy work built over 40 years informs our deep concerns about the prospect of mass deportation operations targeting the 11 million undocumented immigrants but impacting millions more Americans in the United States. Such actions would devastate Latino and other families and communities, including U.S.-born children in mixed-status households while creating lasting economic and social harm.

Based on our expertise, we express grave concern over proposals for mass deportation operations targeting the 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States. Deporting undocumented workers will hurt the U.S. economy by increasing the costs of goods and undermining its growth. They will also rip apart mixed-status families, leaving U.S. citizen children in conditions that impact their ability to thrive in the country. Finally, they will lead to ethnic profiling of Latinos, creating an environment of fear that runs counter to the country's long-held values of justice and fairness for all Americans.

We urge this Committee and Congress to use its considerable policy and government funding powers to prevent the far-reaching consequences of mass deportations and instead advance the balanced border and immigration solutions, including legalization of the undocumented, that Latinos and the broader electorate support.

Mass Deportations Are a Threat to the U.S. Economy

Mass deportations and the climate of fear they would generate threaten our nation's economic future by removing key workers from the country's labor force who help strengthen the prosperity of all Americans, regardless of their background. In 2020, the Pew Research Center estimated undocumented workers formed 22 percent of all agriculture jobs, 15 percent of all construction jobs, and 8 percent of all manufacturing jobs.[viii] In 2022, Pew also noted that 8.3 million undocumented workers made up 4.8 percent of the total U.S. workforce.[ix]

Deporting these workers would destabilize and add to severe labor shortages already experienced in these industries,[x] leading to increases in the price of goods. In agriculture, for instance, deporting undocumented workers would reduce the labor force available to harvest crops and process food, driving up food prices.[xi] In the housing sector, fewer workers to build homes would worsen housing shortages and keep prices high[xii] at a time when Americans struggle to buy a home.[xiii] More broadly, a June 2024 study found that deporting 7.5 million undocumented workers would lead to three years of higher inflation, which would peak at 3.1 percentage points.[1]

Deporting undocumented workers would also hurt the employment rates of U.S. citizens. A 2023 study on the Secure Communities, a national information-sharing enforcement program that helped deport 424,000 individuals between 2010 and 2015,[xiv] found that removing 400,000 low-skilled non-citizen workers reduced employment for low-to-middle-skilled immigrants by 13 percent and for mid-to-high-skilled U.S. citizens by 2.5 percent. Mass deportations on a larger scale would similarly increase labor costs, reduce employer demand for U.S.-born workers, and decrease local consumption,[2] leading to more job losses.

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[1] It also found that deporting this number of workers would reduce the country's work hours by 3.6 percent and its GDP by 6.2 percent or $1.7 trillion at 2023 levels. McKibbin, Warwick, Megan Hogan, and Marcus Noland, "Migration Restrictions and Damages to the U.S. Economy," Peterson Institute for International Economics, June 26, 2024, https://www.piie.com/sites/default/files/2024-06/2024-06-26warwickppt.pdf (accessed November 27, 2024).

[2] Secure Communities had similar impacts on specific job sectors reliant on immigrant workers. A 2022 study that examined how the program impacted employment rates in the early childhood care sector observed the increased fear of deportation during this period deterred 8.6 percent of low-educated workers from pursuing this work, due to a 15.8 percent decrease in Hispanic immigrant childhood care workers.
The program also reduced low-skilled native-born worker levels by 2.8 percent and high-skilled ones by 2 percent. The loss of low-skilled immigrants meant Early Childhood Care employers no longer needed as many low-to high-skilled U.S. citizen workers to complement their skills, leading to reduced employment for these groups. Ali, Umair, Jessica H. Brown, and Chris M. Herbst, "Secure Communities as Immigration Enforcement: How Secure Is the Child

Finally, current proposals to deport all undocumented immigrants would harm the U.S. economy by expanding the national debt.[3] Deporting all undocumented workers would shrink the country's GDP by 2.6 percent – nearly $5 trillion – over a decade.[xv] Far from yielding fiscal savings as some have questionably argued, these measures would cost the U.S. economy at least $1.6 trillion.[xvi] Mass deportations would be prohibitively expensive for the federal government, costing at least $315 billion[4] while removing taxpayers who contribute $46.8 billion in federal taxes, $29.3 billion in state and local taxes, and 22.6 billion in Social Security contributions.[xvii]

Mass Deportations Will Significantly Harm U.S. Citizen Children

Mass deportations would inflict profound, multigenerational harm on families, with their children bearing the most devastating consequences. Studies indicate that the combined effects of deportations and the fear of enforcement actions can undermine a child's economic stability, health, and educational outcomes, which limits their ability to thrive and make future contributions to our country as students and workers.

Mass deportations will rip the many mixed-status families living in the U.S. apart, leaving a significant number of children extremely vulnerable. At the start of 2025, 28.2 million U.S. residents will live in a household with at least one undocumented family member, including 19.5 million Latinos. These residents include 11 million American citizens who reside with these individuals, most of whom have been in the U.S. for a decade or more. Finally, these American citizens include 5.5 million children, roughly 8 percent of all children in the U.S.[xviii]

Sweeping, indiscriminate deportations would put these U.S.-born children at serious social and economic risk. Studies estimate that the deportation of parents would see income for the remaining household drop by 47 percent, which would plunge many children deeper into poverty.[xix] Other studies show that detaining or deporting a parent can cause hunger among these children since the decrease in income can leave families struggling to pay for food.[xx]

The fear of family separation influences decisions that parents and their children must make, from accessing income and social supports, such as free school meals, to choices about going to school

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Care Market?," IZA Institute of Labor Economics, No. 15821, December 2022, https://docs.iza.org/dp15821.pdf (accessed November 26, 2024).

[3] A fuller examination of the economic costs of mass deportations and large-scale enforcement actions in Lynch, Robert and Michael Ettlinger, "Literature Review on the Economic Consequences of the Deportation of Unauthorized Immigrants," July 24, 2024, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4898970 (accessed November 26, 2024) and Lynch, Robert and Michael Ettlinger, "The Economic Impact on Citizens and Authorized Immigrants of Mass Deportation," University of New Hampshire Carsey School of Public Policy, August 29, 2024, https://carsey.unh.edu/sites/default/files/media/2024-08/economic-impact-mass-deportation-lit-review.pdf (accessed November 26, 2024).

[4] If one million individuals were deported annually over a decade, costs could soar to nearly one trillion. These costs would include expanding detention facilities and the complex logistics to carry out these operations.

or work before these children reach the age of 18. These impacts could reduce the chances they improve their economic status and excel in their educational studies, and could have serious consequences for their mental and physical health.[xxi]

Studies on the negative impacts of these conditions on the educational attainment of these children illustrate this point. A 2018 study that surveyed 3,500 educators[5] during a period of expanded interior enforcement found:

- Sixty-eight percent of the respondents reported increased absenteeism among children in immigrant families, largely based on fears that immigration authorities would detain them near schools.
- Ninety percent also said they had observed emotional and behavioral problems in these children.[6]
- Finally, the educators noted a decline in their students' parental involvement, which is essential for better academic performance.[xxii]

The anxiety, absences, or sudden disappearances of these students would ripple through our education system, causing widespread disruption in classrooms even for students who aren't the direct targets of deportations. As children stay home out of fear or are removed along with their parents, the mental health and academic success of both immigrant and native-born students would be put at risk. Studies demonstrate that local immigration enforcement raids and increased collaboration between federal immigration authorities and local law enforcement increase chronic student absenteeism and displacing of students, harming students' future academic success.[xxiii]

Mass Deportations Will Lead to Widespread Injustice

Mass deportations risk escalating civil rights violations with law enforcement targeting more individuals based on their race, ethnicity, language, or appearance—a threat to our country's values of fairness and equal justice under the law that would have an outsized impact on Hispanics and communities of color.

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[5] Gándara, Patricia and Jongyeon Ea, "U.S. Immigration Enforcement Policy and Its Impact on Teaching and Learning in the Nation's Schools," UCLA Civil Rights Project, February 28, 2018, https://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/immigration-immigrant-students/u.s.-immigration-enforcement-policy-and-its-impact-on-teaching-and-learning-in-the-nations-schools/Immigration-enforcement-on-schools-093018.pdf (accessed November 27, 2024).

[6] A 2019 UnidosUS study that surveyed 92 educators found similar results. 92 percent of respondents reported their students expressing fear over experiencing immigration enforcement. 92 percent also observed immigration enforcement concerns impacted their overall classroom climate, directly and indirectly affecting their students' ability to learn. Finally, 81 percent noticed a decline in their students' academic performance due these concerns. Ruskin, Emily, "A Generation at Risk: The Impact of Immigration Enforcement on UnidosUS-Affiliated Classrooms and Educators," UnidosUS, March 6, 2020, https://unidosus.org/publications/2024-a-generation-at-risk-the-impact-of-immigration-enforcement-on-unidosus-affiliated-classrooms-and-educators/ (accessed November 24, 2024).

It is important to clarify what mass deportations will mean for American communities writ large. As the detention and deportation of undocumented individuals ramp up, the government will inevitably target, roundup, and harass more U.S. citizens, including the U.S. citizen children in mixed-status families targeted for removal. The likelihood that authorities will justify these abuses, or worse, deportations, of U.S. citizens under the guise of enforcing immigration laws means citizens will have limited means to pursue justice against these violations. This scenario creates a dangerous opening for abuses of federal power at all levels.[7]

The experience of the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugees Rights Coalition (TIRRC), one of UnidosUS's affiliates, serves as a potent example of the way expanded enforcement undermines our constitutional rights. In April 2018, immigration authorities raided a meatpacking plant in Bean Station, Tennessee, detaining 97 individuals in a worksite raid that was one of the largest since the mid-2000s. Immigration authorities detained individuals who looked Latino without regard to their citizenship status or documentation, which served as the basis of a lawsuit co-filed by TIRRC given the raid's violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fifth Amendment.[xxiv] The courts ultimately approved a 1 million dollar settlement in favor of the workers.[xxv]

Targeting Latino and immigrant communities will also lead to fewer reports of crime, making us all less safe. Between 2016 and 2018, for instance, reports from cities such as Houston, Dallas, Los Angeles, and Miami, noted Latinos were reporting fewer crimes due to fears of interacting with federal immigration authorities.[xxvi] A 2018 survey on this topic found that 60.8 percent of the respondents said they were "less likely to report a crime they witnessed," while 42.9 percent said they were "less likely to report being a victim of a crime."[xxvii] Police departments in Houston and Miami also said this decrease in crime reporting made it harder to combat crime, showing indiscriminate immigration enforcement will make it harder for local authorities to keep our cities safe.[xxviii]

Conclusion: Legalization Is the Right Path Forward

UnidosUS's polling consistently shows that Latino voters strongly prefer providing an earned path to citizenship for the long-residing undocumented over mass deportations.[xxix] They support a

[7] New laws that require local law enforcement to detain suspected undocumented individuals increase the chances police will commit similar offenses, a scenario that occurred with Arizona's SB 1070, the notorious "show me your papers law" that allowed local law enforcement to detain individuals based on their appearances. Immigration Legal Resource Center, "Criminalizing Immigration: The Influence of SB 4, Texas's Regressive State Deportation Law," Immigration Legal Resource Center, October 22, 2024, https://www.ilrc.org/sb-4-criminalizing-immigration (accessed November 27, 2024); American Civil Liberties Union, "SB 1070 at the Supreme Court: What's at Stake," American Civil Liberties Union, https://www.aclu.org/sb-1070-supreme-court-whats-stake (accessed November 28, 2024); Lacayo, A. Elena, "One Year Later: A Look at SB 1070 and Copycat Legislation, National Council of La Raza, April 18, 2021, https://unidosus.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/A_look_at_SB_1070.pdf (accessed November 27, 2024); National Council of La Raza, "Questions and Answers About the Boycott of Arizona," https://unidosus.org/wp content/uploads/2021/07/AZ_NCLR_QA.pdf (accessed November 27, 2024).

balanced approach that would also bring order to the border by tackling drug traffickers and human smugglers operating in the U.S.-Mexico border, investing in technology to monitor the U.S.-Mexico border, and ensuring migrants can apply for asylum throughout the region. In short, Latinos want an approach that's firm, fair, free of cruelty, and makes the nation stronger.

Government-administered mass deportation, however, would destabilize the country, cause human suffering among a broad swath of American families, including those without immigrants, and undermine the economic vitality of the nation now and well into the future. We urge Congress to use its authority to protect children and families, defend our communities, and advance balanced border and immigration solutions that are in our national interest.

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