

*Statement
July 23, 2026*

ESSENTIAL WORKER IMMIGRATION COALITION STATEMENT ON THE INTRODUCTION OF THE STATE SPONSORED VISA PILOT PROGRAM ACT

The Essential Worker Immigration Coalition (EWIC) applauds Senators John Curtis (R-UT) and Mark Kelly (D-AZ) for introducing legislation to establish a state-sponsored visa pilot program. We commend the senators for contributing a serious, constructive proposal to the national conversation about legal immigration reform and for recognizing that states, communities, and employers across the country face workforce challenges that demand lawful, flexible, and accountable solutions.

For too long, our federal immigration system has applied a one-size-fits-all approach to a country where labor needs vary significantly from state to state and community to community. A rural community facing agricultural labor or physician shortages may have very different needs from a metropolitan area seeking technology, hospitality, construction, health care, or skilled trade workers. Yet employers and communities across these regions are too often left to navigate the same outdated legal immigration system. Senators Curtis and Kelly deserve credit for recognizing this problem and offering a framework that would give governors and state legislatures a more meaningful role in addressing their unique workforce needs.

The State Sponsored Visa Pilot Program Act represents a practical, forward-looking approach to immigration reform. By allowing states to sponsor workers based on their specific economic and workforce demands, while preserving federal oversight, vetting, and program integrity, the proposal reflects the kind of federalist and cross-party policymaking that is too rare in today's political climate. It also recognizes that strengthening lawful immigration channels can help support American businesses, protect workers, promote compliance, and reduce incentives for unauthorized migration.

EWIC also welcomes other constructive proposals to modernize legal immigration, including the Essential Workers for Economic Advancement Act led by Representative Lloyd Smucker and bipartisan cosponsors. That legislation offers an alternative approach by creating a targeted H-2C framework for essential, year-round, nonagricultural positions. The State Sponsored Visa Pilot Program Act presents a different model, and EWIC believes Congress benefits from considering multiple serious ideas that respond to the real workforce needs facing American employers and communities.

We appreciate the willingness of Senators Curtis and Kelly to engage in a policy area that has too often been mired in gridlock. EWIC looks forward to continuing to work with policymakers

in both parties as this process moves ahead, including by helping refine and strengthen proposals to ensure the strongest possible outcome for employers, workers, communities, and the integrity of the immigration system.

EWIC believes that meeting America's workforce needs and safeguarding our borders can and must go hand in hand. We encourage members of both parties to continue advancing practical legal immigration reforms that strengthen the U.S. economy, support American businesses, protect workers, and maintain accountability and public confidence in the immigration system.

The Essential Worker Immigrant Coalition (EWIC) is a broad-based coalition of national businesses and trade associations from across the industry spectrum concerned with the shortage of both semi-skilled and unskilled ("essential worker") labor. EWIC supports policies that facilitate the employment of essential workers by U.S. companies that are unable to find American workers (www.ewic.org).