November 16, 2023

Dear Speaker Johnson, Majority Leader Schumer, Democratic Leader Jeffries, and Republican Leader McConnell:

The more than 100 undersigned businesses, trade associations, and chambers of commerce representing America's most important industries and regional economies are committed to promoting economic growth and job creation in the United States. From manufacturing to agriculture and from Main Street to Fortune 500 companies, the U.S. economy relies on our diverse, talented workforce to drive the country forward. We ask you to address a critical statutory barrier preventing many newly arrived asylum seekers from quickly entering the workforce. Under current law, asylum seekers must wait for at least six months after they have applied for asylum to receive a work permit. Unfortunately, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is experiencing chronic case processing backlogs,¹ which means this waiting period can easily last eight months or longer.

In the meantime, people seeking safety who are already in the United States and want to work are prevented from doing so for months. This hinders their ability to provide for their families, creates a cost for local communities who must tap into public resources to provide shelter and other services, and keeps employers from tapping into a much-needed, willing, otherwise available workforce.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' latest numbers, there are 9.6 million job openings,² with only 6.5 million people looking for work.³ This issue is important to every one of our communities as we consistently hear from businesses that are struggling with unprecedented worker shortages, especially in industries such as durable goods manufacturing, transportation, accommodation and food, wholesale and retail, and leisure and hospitality.⁴

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Studies have shown that the national labor shortage is the result of two factors: an increase in retirements as the baby boomer generation reaches retirement age, and lower labor participation rates since the pandemic. Indeed, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce estimates that 1.9 million workers have left the workforce since the start of the pandemic in February 2020.

Simply put, there are too many open jobs without enough workers to fill them. Allowing asylum seekers to enter the workforce more quickly would go a long way toward ameliorating these challenges.

The current barrier to quickly getting asylum applicants into the workforce is statutory, and it requires Congress to act. There are several legislative proposals in Congress that not only reduce the waiting period for asylum seekers to obtain work permits from 180 days to 30, but also provide additional funding for work permit processing to increase USCIS’ capacity to quickly process work permit applications in the future. We urge Congress to pass legislation that would make these crucial changes to bolster the workforce, allow businesses to grow, and further strengthen our economy.

Sincerely,

AGC Maine
American Arab Chamber of Commerce
American Hotel and Lodging Association
Amplio Recruiting
Asian American Chamber of Commerce Pittsburgh
Austin Chamber of Commerce
Bachos Lawn Service
Bartell Georgalas & Juarez LPA Co.
Berry, Appleman & Leiden
Biddeford & Saco Chamber of Commerce
Borderplex Alliance
Boulder Chamber
Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance
Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut
Chehalem Valley Chamber of Commerce
Cincinnati Compass
Coalition of Franchisee Associations
Colorado Dairy Farmers
Critical Labor Coalition

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Dallas Regional Chamber
Dayton Area Chamber of Commerce
Detroit Regional Chamber
El Paso Chamber
Elevate Northland
Ethiopian Tewahedo Social Services
Euclid Chamber of Commerce
Fifth Group Restaurants
Findlay-Hancock County Chamber of Commerce
Flint & Genesee Chamber
Fort Bend Chamber
Fort Worth Chamber
Futurety LLC
Global Cleveland
Grand Rapids Chamber
Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce
Greater Houston LGBTQ+ Chamber of Commerce
Greater Houston Partnership
Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce
Greater Louisville Inc. - The Metro Chamber of Commerce
Greater Omaha Chamber
Greater Phoenix Chamber
Greater Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce
Greater San Antonio Chamber of Commerce
Hispanic Chamber Cincinnati USA
Holderbaum's Painting Inc.
HospitalityMaine
Host-A-Scholar
Houston Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
Houston Northwest Chamber of Commerce
Hudson County Chamber of Commerce
Hunt Companies, Inc.
Husch Blackwell LLP
IBC Bank
Kentucky Chamber of Commerce
Kori Art
Lancaster Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce
Latin American Chamber of Commerce Charlotte
Lewiston Auburn Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce
Lima
Longview TX Chamber of Commerce
Luke's Lobster
Maine Society of Certified Public Accountants
Maine State Chamber of Commerce
Marek Construction
Michigan West Coast Chamber of Commerce
Middlesex County Regional Chamber of Commerce
Minneapolis Regional Chamber
National Restaurant Association
National Retail Federation
New Jersey Business Immigration Coalition
New Mexico Chamber of Commerce
North Texas Commission
Northern Ohio Area Chambers of Commerce (NOACC)
Ohio Hotel & Lodging Association
Ohio Lawn Care Association
Ohio Life Sciences Association
Ohio Turfgrass Foundation
Opelika Chamber of Commerce
Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce
Quad Cities Chamber of Commerce
Regionomics LLC
Reno + Sparks Chamber of Commerce
Rocky Mountain Mechanical Contractors Association
Salt Lake Chamber
San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce
Sandusky County Share and Care
SHRM
St. Paul Area Chamber
State Business Executives
Strengthen LA
Texas Association of Business
Texas Business Leadership Council
Texas International Produce Association
The El Paso Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
The Gallegos Corporation
Time Equities, Inc.
U.S. Chamber of Commerce
U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
United Corpus Christi Chamber of Commerce
Vail Valley Partnership
Western Ohio Cut Stone
Youngstown Warren Regional Chamber