Update the Registry Program's Legal Pathway

Section 249 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, the "registry" program, has long provided a legal path through which longtime non-citizen residents may apply for lawful permanent residence (LPR). Eligibility requirements include continuous U.S. residence, being of "good moral character," and having entered the country before a specified cutoff, known as the "registry date." Congress has periodically updated the registry date, most recently changing it to January 1, 1972 in 1986. After four decades without revision, **the registry program has become functionally obsolete** for all but a small and shrinking number of people. Registry approvals fell from 58,944 between FY1985 and FY1989 to 2,319 in the 2000s, and just 215 between FY2020 and FY2024.

Congress must pass the Renewing Immigration Provisions of the Immigration Act of 1929 to restore this longstanding legal pathway and allow eligible long-term residents of "good moral character," many of whom have worked, paid taxes, raised families, and contributed to their communities for decades, to apply for lawful permanent residence.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Protects U.S. national security

Updating registry would allow DHS to screen applicants as they come forward and redirect enforcement resources toward individuals who pose genuine public-safety or national-security threats, rather than long-term residents of good moral character.

Provides an alternative to costly and harmful mass deportation

Deportation tears apart mixed-status families, separates U.S. citizens from loved ones, and has been proven to harm children's health, development, and financial security. Deporting one million undocumented immigrants annually would also cost taxpayers an estimated $88 billion per year - nearly $1 trillion over a decade - even if 20% leave voluntarily.

Strengthens the U.S. economy

Updating registry would protect eligible workers from removal, prevent severe labor shortages in critical industries, and safeguard the productivity, growth, and billions in annual tax contributions they sustain, including an estimated $96.7 billion in 2022. Unauthorized immigrants represent 5.6% of the U.S. workforce, including nearly one in four farming workers and almost one in five construction workers. ICE raids are already reducing employment for both U.S. born and undocumented workers and mass removal of undocumented workers could reduce GDP by 4.2% to 6.8%.

Upholds Catholic social teaching

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has called for an earned pathway to legal status for long-term residents. Updating registry would advance Catholic social teaching by upholding human dignity, protecting families, standing in solidarity with vulnerable people, and strengthening stability in U.S. communities.

CONGRESSIONAL ASK

Pass the Renewing Immigration Provisions of the Immigration Act of 1929 (S. 2468 and H.R. 4696).

Update the outdated "registry date" in current law to allow long-term undocumented residents with good moral character to apply for lawful permanent residence.

JRS/USA is the U.S. branch of Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), a Catholic agency that accompanies, serves, and advocates with refugees and forcibly displaced people in 55+ countries.

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JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE

The People Behind Registry Reform

Their stories reflect millions of workers, entrepreneurs, taxpayers, parents, and valued community members whose contributions strengthen the United States.

35-year U.S. resident who built hundreds of homes

Houston, TX | Construction business owner | 35 years in the U.S.

A construction business owner lived in the U.S. for 35 years. As a small-business owner, he built hundreds of homes, employed dozens of workers, and was a dedicated father who put his three U.S.-citizen sons through college. He had no criminal record and was seeking legal status when an ICE officer fatally shot him in July 2026. His life illustrates the deep roots, contributions, and good moral character of many long-term U.S. residents for whom an updated registry would provide a fair opportunity to seek lawful permanent residence.

Successful entrepreneur who created jobs

Oakland, CA | Restaurant and catering company owner | 25+ years in the U.S.

A woman who arrived in the U.S. at age six now co-owns two successful Oakland restaurants with her mother. After receiving DACA, Maldonado gained access to financing and opened their first restaurant in 2019. Their business has since generated more than $1 million in sales, created 15 jobs, and paid business and payroll taxes. In 2025, Maldonado was selected for the San Francisco Business Times' "40 Under 40" award. Despite having lived in the U.S. most of her life, she cannot apply for permanent legal status.

CEO who built a $5 million construction business

Dallas, TX | Home-design and construction company owner | 25+ years in the U.S.

A DACA recipient founded a home-design and construction company that employs 13 staff and supports additional subcontractor jobs. The company generated $5 million in revenue in 2022. In 2023, Serrano was named to the Dallas Business Journal's "40 Under 40" in recognition of his business and community leadership. He credits DACA with providing stability and access to banking and supplier credit that helped him grow his company. Yet, despite living in the U.S. for over 25 years, he is not eligible for lawful permanent residence.

Long-time community restaurant owner

Granger, IN | Restaurant owner | 20 years in the U.S.

A man who lived in the U.S. for nearly 20 years and held a temporary work permit owned a popular Indiana restaurant regarded as a local institution and employed up to 20 people. A husband and father of three U.S.-citizen children, he had no criminal record, reported annually to ICE, and spent years and substantial resources seeking lawful status. Friends and customers described him as hardworking, positive, and central to the community. He was deported in 2017, before he got a chance to apply for lawful permanent residence.

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