There are 5.2 million undocumented immigrants working in jobs that have been designated essential during the COVID-19 pandemic. This accounts for almost 3 out of 4 undocumented workers in the United States.

From janitors cleaning hospital floors, to farm workers picking America’s crops, to EMTs and nurses saving lives, undocumented essential workers have done the jobs that can’t be done remotely - putting their lives on the line so other Americans would not have to.

As a result of their high rates of exposure, immigrant essential workers and their families have borne high costs, being likelier to contract and die from COVID-19 which contributes to the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on communities of color.

Of the approximately 5 million undocumented essential workers, around 1 million would be defined as “Dreamers” under the American Dream and Promise Act, with many holding DACA status. The other 4 million plus undocumented essential workers largely lack any protection from deportation, meaning a worker deemed essential today could be deported tomorrow.

In addition to helping Americans stay healthy and fed during the COVID-19 crisis, undocumented essential workers are also an engine of economic prosperity. Undocumented workers contribute up to $79.7 billion in federal taxes and $41 billion in state and local taxes annually.
WHAT DOES THE CITIZENSHIP FOR ESSENTIAL WORKERS ACT DO?

- Adjustment of Status to Legal Permanent Resident under the Citizenship for Essential Workers Act is open to any non-citizen worker in the sectors of:
  - Health care
  - Agriculture
  - Construction
  - Emergency response
  - Sanitation
  - Food
  - Restaurants
  - Hotels and hospitality
  - Meat, fish, and poultry processing
  - Domestic work
  - Childcare
  - Disaster recovery
  - Home health and residential care
  - Manufacturing
  - Warehousing
  - Transportation and logistics
  - Janitorial
  - Laundry services
  - Any other worker deemed essential by the Department of Homeland Security or state or local government.

- The Citizenship for Essential Workers Act will also include undocumented workers who worked in essential industries but lost employment due to COVID-19, including leaving the job due to unsafe working conditions, as well as undocumented relatives of an essential worker who died from COVID-19.

- Applicants for adjustment of status will be required to pay a reasonable fee and go through a background check. All information provided or disclosed in an application for this act may not be used for enforcement purposes.

- The Citizenship for Essential Workers Act also aims to preserve family unity by repealing the three- and ten-year bars for re-entry into the United States.

WHY SUPPORT THE CITIZENSHIP FOR ESSENTIAL WORKERS ACT?

- Undocumented workers have been essential during the pandemic and will be just as essential during the recovery. Over 60 top economists recently made that case in a letter urging the Biden administration to include a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants as part of COVID-19 relief, pointing that such a policy would increase prosperity and reduce poverty for all Americans.

- This legislation is the broadest stand-alone pathway to citizenship proposed by Congress for any specific group of immigrant workers and can be part of a broader COVID-19 relief and economic recovery package.

SOURCES: