



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,<sup>1</sup> 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,<sup>2</sup> with only 6.5 million people looking for work.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, "I-765, Application for Employment Authorization Counts of Pending Petitions by Days Pending For All Eligibility Categories and (c)(8) Pending Asylum Category As of April 1, 2023,"

[https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/data/I765\\_P\\_AllCat\\_C08\\_FY2023Q2.pdf](https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/data/I765_P_AllCat_C08_FY2023Q2.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Job Openings and Labor Turnover Summary – September 2023," <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/jolts.nr0.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "The Employment Situation – October 2023," <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.nr0.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Chamber of Commerce, "America Works Data Center," <https://www.uschamber.com/workforce/america-works-data-center>; American Hotel and Lodging Association, "87% of Hotels Surveyed Report Staffing Shortages," October 3, 2022, <https://www.ahla.com/news/87-surveyed-hotels-report-staffing-shortages>; Route Fifty, "The Industries Most Affected by America's Labor Shortages," January 27, 2023, <https://www.route-fifty.com/workforce/2023/01/industries-most-affected-americas-labor-shortage/382337/>.

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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup>

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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<sup>5</sup> American Immigration Council, *Labor Market Series*, "Tending to America's Food Supply: The Essential Roles of Immigrants in America's Meat and Dairy Industries," June 2022, [https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/tending\\_to\\_americas\\_food\\_supply\\_meat\\_dairy\\_industries.pdf](https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/tending_to_americas_food_supply_meat_dairy_industries.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Lindsay Cates and Stephanie Ferguson, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, "Understanding America's Labor Shortage: The Most Impacted States," September 15, 2023, <https://www.uschamber.com/workforce/the-states-suffering-most-from-the-labor-shortage>.

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