

*We present the following legislative packet for Virginia Organizing supporters and members to engage in advocating for comprehensive immigration reform.*

## **How to set up a meeting with your member of Congress:**

### **Before the meeting:**

Learn about your Members of Congress. Before setting up your visit, make use of the links below to answer these questions to be prepared: Who are your Senators? Who represents your district in the House of Representatives? What is their party affiliation? What are their Committee assignments? Do they hold a leadership position?

- To determine who your Representative is, visit: <http://www.house.gov> and enter your zip code (you might also be asked for your address).
- A listing of all Representatives by State can be found at:  
<http://www.house.gov/representatives/>
- To determine who your Senators are, visit:  
[http://www.senate.gov/general/contact\\_information/senators\\_cfm.cfm](http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm)
- Currently, Senators Tim Kaine and Mark Warner represent Virginia.
- You may also call the Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 to find out who your Senators and Representatives are and be connected to them.

### **Requesting a meeting:**

Call and ask to speak to the Congress member's scheduler in your home state/district, or write a letter to request a meeting. Go to the member's web site (which can be located in the links provided above) to find their contact number and e-mail address. You can also call the Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121.

When you speak to the scheduler, or submit a written request be sure to explain that:

- You are a constituent from \_\_\_\_ (city or town in their district/state).
- You would like to set up an appointment to meet with your Representative/Senator (or his/her staff) and are interested in discussing immigration reform.
- You will be attending the meeting with \_\_\_ (number of) community members/faith leaders/students from your state/district.

**Make sure to follow-up** any written meeting requests with a phone call, and any phone meeting requests with an e-mail, letter or fax to confirm the appointment.

**Have talking points ready and “leave behinds” prepared.** Before you go into the meeting, it is important to be prepared. This is a good way to provide the Congressional office with additional details and information on your issues and programs that you may not have had time to cover in your meeting. Be sure to bring multiple copies for multiple visits.

### During the Meeting:

**Introduce yourselves and exchange credentials.** In five minutes or less, explain what groups are represented, information about their membership, and other information that the member or staffer should know about those who attend the meeting.

**Share your stories.** What connects you to this issue? Why is it important for your family or community? Get the contact information and card for any staffers you meet with.

**Make your ask.** What does the member of Congress think of a pathway to citizenship? Will he/she support it?

**Listen well.** Make sure you do not do all of the talking. Much of lobbying is listening, looking for indications of the legislator’s views, and finding opportunities to provide information. Give your legislator opportunities to ask questions or state his or her opinion. Members and staff will appreciate the chance to be heard.

**Ask questions and take notes.** If the legislator asks a question, answer honestly. If you don’t know the answer, say that you don’t know but you will find out, and then be sure to follow up.

### After the Meeting:

Always follow up a meeting with a thank you note and any additional information you may have promised during the meeting. The best way to send information to Washington D.C. offices is via fax or email. Let Emily Riehl know how the meeting went—email her at [eeriehl@virginia-organizing.org](mailto:eeriehl@virginia-organizing.org).

### What we want:

#### **1. Secure the broadest possible legalization, offering a path to citizenship.**

- It is estimated that 11 million undocumented immigrants, including 2 million undocumented children, currently live in this country. We must provide a clear and earned path to citizenship for them.
- Legalization would end the “underground” economy and increase the amount of taxes contributed to Social Security and benefit programs.
- Legalized workers would stimulate the economy by investing in education, opening businesses, buying houses, and fueling consumer spending.
- The citizenship process requires registration, which allows the government to know who is in the country and to perform criminal background checks when appropriate.
- Federal legislation would put an end to local and state reforms that have torn apart communities.
- Given all the benefits of a path to citizenship:
  - We are opposed to the requirement that all potential citizens must learn English. This would be costly and exclude a lot of potentially eligible persons.
  - The waiting period should be, at most, five years for granting citizenship.
  - Establish simple administrative procedure(s) and increase immigration courts to deal with this new influx.

#### **2. Family Reunification.**

- Families should be together. A solution that represents American values would encompass reform in which everyone who applies for citizenship the right way will get to see their loved ones in a reasonable amount of time.
- The immigration backlog must be fixed: facilitate prompt and comprehensive family reunification; an estimated 4 million immigrants are waiting in line now.
- Backlogs hurt the economy. When workers cannot be with their spouses and children, it affects U.S. competitiveness. Wait time for spouses and minor children of green card holders is five years, which is too long.
- All types of families should be reunified. Currently, there are 36,000 bi-national same sex couples in the U.S.

### **3. Protect rights and working conditions for all workers.**

- Employers have a legal responsibility to pay their workers a fair and equitable wage and benefits.
- Any reform package must allocate employment visas through an independent commission that can assess labor shortages and determine the number and characteristics of foreign workers to be admitted, with Congress' approval.
- We must protect the rights of future workers to organize and bargain collectively, regardless of whether they were born in the U.S. or abroad. The following conditions should be met:
  - Ensure immigrant access to health insurance and retirement benefits.
  - Enforcement of federal labor laws should be strengthened.
  - Consistently deliver health and safety training to all employees.
  - Develop a mechanism to foster fair responses to intimidation and other employee issues.

### **4. Block enforcement measures that violate due process.**

- Mass detention and deportation of immigrants is immoral and costly, and must stop.
- The role of police officers is to work together with people in their communities to ensure safety, not to act as Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). When police powers are extended to include the ability to act as an arm of ICE, it blocks relationships of trust and prevents effective community policing.
- Border patrol officers must be held responsible for respecting the human rights of all people.
- Detention centers and immigration courts must respect the rights of all people to a fair trial, legal representation, and a translator if needed.

### **5. Accord the responsibilities and rights required for full integration into American society.**

- The same privileges and civil liberties of American citizens should be afforded to newly naturalized immigrants.
- As swift of a process as possible should be implemented on this path to citizenship.
- We must institute a well-advertised process, so that as many people as possible can take advantage of the new policy.

## Facts About Immigration and FAQs:

### Supporting Facts About Reform:

*There is public support for reform.* Polls have shown that the majority of the American people want Congress to provide a sensible solution to our nation's broken immigration system, including a path to citizenship.

*Millions of families are affected by immigration policies.* There are 16.6 million people that belong to mixed-status families with at least one U.S. citizen and one undocumented member, many of whom are parents or heads of household

*Reform is good for the economy.* Bringing undocumented immigrants off the economic sidelines would generate \$1.5 trillion in cumulative GDP over 10 years. And it would add around \$5 billion in federal tax revenues over the next three years.

*Reform is good for **all** workers.* If the 8.5 million legal permanent residents who are eligible to naturalize did so, they would see an 8 percent to 11 percent boost in wages, leading to a \$21 billion to \$45 billion cumulative increase in wages, which would then ripple through the economy, creating significant gains overall.

*Immigrants are part of our tax base.* Immigrants paid \$11.2 billion in state and local taxes in 2010 alone, adding a significant amount of money to help state and local finances.

*There is bipartisan support for reform efforts.* The reform frameworks offered by the White House and the Senate group leading this effort are very close in terms of priorities and the instruments of effective reform, including a path to citizenship and maintaining border security. Border security is already a priority, and we have the results to prove it.

## FAQs:

### **1. We tried “amnesty” in 1986, and it failed. How can you promise the American people that we won’t be back in the same place 10 years from now?**

The 1986 law fell short because it didn’t go far enough. It applied some band-aids but did not create a 21st century immigration policy. The current proposed plan combines three elements –a roadmap to citizenship, a modernized legal immigration process and a way to hold employers accountable – that will ensure an orderly legal immigration system going forward. The goal is to solve the problem once and for all.

### **2. Immigration reform has failed in the past. Why is this time different?**

There is a political, a moral and an economic imperative for immigration reform. The moral imperative is that our current system separates families, exploits immigrant workers, undercuts American workers, and allows unscrupulous employers to gain an unfair advantage over honest employers. We need a level playing field where everyone plays by the same set of rules. And economically, if we are to have fairness in the job market and growth from our entrepreneurs, smart immigration policies are a key part of the equation.

### **3. Won’t immigration reform be easier to pass if we break it down into pieces?**

If we want to fix the broken immigration system once and for all, we have to pass broad reform that simultaneously combines the three key elements: create a roadmap to citizenship for immigrants settled in America, have smart enforcement combined with respect for rights, and modernize our legal immigration system. This combination will turn a dysfunctional patchwork into a system that is orderly and fair.

### **4. Why are you even talking about immigration reform when our economy is such a mess? Shouldn’t we get that fixed first?**

One of the ways to help fix the economy is to fix the broken immigration system. Immigrants, regardless of how they came here, contribute to our economy. From those who cook the food we eat to those who create innovative businesses, new immigrants realize the value of working hard and doing their part in exchange for the blessings of liberty. As for economic impact, a study by the Center for American Progress and the Immigration Policy Center showed that the creation of a common sense immigration process would lead to \$1.5 trillion in increased GDP over 10 years, contribute to the creation of as many as 900,000 jobs and increase revenues as much as \$5.4 billion.

Just as importantly, immigration reform will level the playing field for hard workers and honest employers. By combining a path to citizenship with a crackdown on illegal hiring, we will make sure that American and immigrant workers are no longer pitted against each other in a race to the bottom by unscrupulous employers seeking to undercut their honest competitors.

## **5. Why don't you just push for the DREAM Act—isn't that more realistic?**

The DREAM Act is very popular, and for good reason. The DREAM Act helps young people who were brought to this country at a young age and who want to attend university, serve in the military and give back to the nation they call home. That's why the DREAM Act is at the heart of a broad reform package. Now is the time to include everyone. This is why DREAMers are leading the fight to make sure immigration reform includes their parents, their older siblings and many other hard working immigrants.

## **6. Isn't "amnesty" for "illegal immigrants" unpopular?**

First of all, it's not amnesty if you have to earn it. To qualify you have to pass a background check, study English, pay taxes, and be of good moral character. After all, people move their families here to the land of freedom and opportunity to provide a better life for their children and contribute to our culture in this country, and we're all the better for having hardworking new Americans as contributing members of our communities. That's why the American people are with us on the question of citizenship – by a margin of more than 2-1 in most polls. In fact, when combined with the other elements of reform, Americans support immigration reform by more than 3-1 margin. A recent bipartisan Hart/Public Opinion Strategies poll found 80 percent of Americans support broad reform with a path to citizenship – including a strong majority of Republican voters.

## **5. Some say a path to citizenship is unfair to those waiting in line to come in legally. Can we make it so it's fair to them?**

There is a way forward that is fair to those waiting in line outside the country and honors our tradition of encouraging citizenship. Immigration reform legislation should clear out the backlogs so that those currently in line are admitted over the next few years. Meanwhile, undocumented immigrants here would only be able to convert their conditional status to permanent resident status once the backlog is cleared. This puts them at the back of the citizenship line, but in a way that makes them eligible for citizenship within a reasonable time frame.

## **6. Why don't we just grant residency, but not citizenship?**

A policy that grants residency but not a path to citizenship would mean that Congress affirmatively and intentionally institutionalizes a permanent sub-class of non-citizens. The message to this group of mostly Latino immigrants would be this: you are good enough to cook for us, clean for us and take care of our children, but you can never become one of us, vote or be truly equal. A policy that says "you are permanently one of them and can never be one of us" does violence to our nation's core values. We Americans proudly say we hold certain truths to be self-evident, that all people have rights, no matter what they look like or where they come from, and that the genius of America is that we are permanently evolving, transforming "them" into "us" in a way that makes "us" stronger. We should extend and defend our tradition of giving new immigrants a chance to become full Americans by earning citizenship.

## 7. Shouldn't we secure the border first, and then take up other immigration issues?

The border has never been more secure. We have ramped up security with 21,000 border patrol agents and state of the art technology along our borders. Border crossings are at a 40-year low. Net illegal immigration is zero. The problem is that for too long the federal government posted signs at the border that say "Do Not Enter" while 100 yards inside America employers post signs saying "Help Wanted." By combining an employment verification system with a streamlined legal immigration system – at the same time we put 11 million undocumented immigrants on a path to citizenship – we will put an end to this hypocrisy and have an immigration system where the laws make sense, the incentives are clear and everyone plays by the same rules.

In fact, for years Congress and the federal government has made immigration enforcement a priority. A recent report from the Migration Policy Institute reveals the skyrocketing cost of this heavy enforcement: in 2012, the U.S. spent \$18 billion on immigration enforcement, and it has spent \$187 billion on immigration enforcement since the Immigration Reform and Control Act in 1986. Current unauthorized immigration levels are a net zero, a 40-year low. We spend more money on immigration law enforcement than on all other federal law enforcement combined. We don't have a problem of not enough enforcement at the border. We have a broken system that needs to be fixed so that the laws are sensible and the rules are enforceable.

## 8. Won't the border commission outlined in the Senate bipartisan proposal delay or derail citizenship?

We need to see the details, but the point of passing a bill to reform our immigration system is to actually reform it—to implement and achieve our goals—not to delay it further. We need a direct, straightforward and clear path to citizenship. We don't want to outsource decision making on such a central piece of reform. We don't want anti-immigration, anti-Latino champions to have a veto over whether a section of the national immigration reform law gets implemented. Members of Congress need to retain the right to legislate, and the Department of Homeland Security needs to retain its authority over setting policy at the border.

## 9. What else can I do to help?

Become active in a Virginia Organizing Chapter! Visit [www.virginia-organizing.org](http://www.virginia-organizing.org) for more information and to find a Chapter near you. If there is no Chapter in your community, contact [info@virginia-organizing.org](mailto:info@virginia-organizing.org) to learn more about other ways to get involved with Virginia Organizing.