

# STATES CAN HELP FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES PROSPER BY TAKING AN INCLUSIVE APPROACH TO PEOPLE WHO ARE UNDOCUMENTED

In sharp contrast to harmful rhetoric and federal administrative actions targeting immigrants that have created a climate of fear, a number of states have adopted pragmatic policies designed to treat all people fairly and give all individuals an opportunity to thrive. This inclusive approach makes sense and holds true to our nation's often-stated but not always respected ideals. With an inclusive approach, states can produce a more educated workforce, ensure that more workers are paid fairly, and help pay for schools and other public services that form a strong foundation for broadly shared prosperity.

States can't make up for federal policymakers' longstanding failure to create a pathway for people without work authorization to become lawful permanent residents or gain authority to work in the U.S. But they can strive to treat all people with dignity and maximize the contributions of all of their residents, regardless of origin or legal status. Giving all people access to economic opportunity would enable people who are undocumented to earn higher wages, spend more in the economy, and contribute more to the state tax base. States should take steps to be more inclusive and ensure that all of us have opportunities to live healthy, prosperous lives.



## About us:

**The State Priorities Partnership** shapes state policies that reduce poverty, advance equity, and promote inclusive economies that pave the way for widespread prosperity. It is coordinated by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

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## PROVIDE EQUAL ACCESS TO DRIVER'S LICENSES

Roads are safest when all drivers are tested, licensed, and insured. Giving people who are undocumented equal access to driver's licenses would help achieve those goals and may reduce traffic fatalities. It could also improve public safety more broadly by enabling law enforcement to focus on more pressing issues than processing unlicensed drivers through local jails and courts. In addition, allowing workers without documentation a license helps them more easily get to work, shop, and drive their children to the doctor, and contribute more to state economies and tax systems.



**PEOPLE WHO ARE UNDOCUMENTED MAKE SIZABLE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THEIR STATE'S ECONOMY AND THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITY.**

## PROVIDE EQUAL ACCESS TO IN-STATE COLLEGE TUITION AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

The U.S. Constitution guarantees all children, no matter their immigration status, a place in public K-12 schools. This helps children reach their full potential and provides state economies with the educated workers of tomorrow. Similarly, states should give all of their college-bound residents access to their higher education systems at in-state tuition rates. And, by coupling this with access to state financial aid, states would remove an additional barrier to enrollment and could boost college completion rates.



## EXTEND HEALTH COVERAGE TO ALL CHILDREN

Extending health coverage to all children regardless of immigration status is a smart investment in a state's long-term health and prosperity. Non-citizen children remain uninsured at a much higher rate than their citizen peers, with nearly a third of the nation's estimated 1 million children who are undocumented lacking health coverage.

Access to health care contributes to better long-term health and economic outcomes for all people; it can particularly benefit children who are undocumented, since they are likelier to be in economically struggling families. Access to health

insurance also improves economic security for low-income children and their families by reducing out-of-pocket medical costs and the prevalence of personal bankruptcies. Over the longer term, children with access to health insurance are likelier to complete high school and college and tend to have higher incomes, more wealth, and higher income growth in adulthood.



## STRENGTHEN LABOR LAW ENFORCEMENT

Labor laws are critical to ensuring that all workers receive the wages they're legally owed so they can best support their families and contribute to the economy. States play a major role in enforcing labor laws and would benefit from adequately funding and staffing their enforcement efforts. Wage violations, for example, substantially diminish workers' earnings and leave them with less to spend in the economy – and workers who are undocumented are more likely than their peers to experience wage violations. Labor laws also put businesses and workers on a more level playing field. Businesses that hire workers who are undocumented have a competitive advantage over businesses that don't, partly because some businesses hire them at below-market wages (often below the minimum wage) and sometimes steal their wages altogether.

States can do more to address wage theft and other labor law violations. For example, they can stiffen penalties for wage-theft violations, scrap outdated rules that exclude certain categories of workers from full protection (like domestic workers), and hire more wage law enforcement agents.

