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Policy Brief: The Dignity Act of 2025

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INTRODUCTION

On July 15, Congresswomen Maria Elvira Salazar (R-FL) and Veronica Escobar (D-TX) and 18 other House members introduced an updated version of the “Dignity Act,” a bipartisan bill that addresses border security, asylum and humanitarian protection, the legal status of people who are undocumented or lack permanent legal status, backlogs in processing, and other needed reforms to provide legal pathways for people to come to the United States. AILA has not endorsed the bill but issued a [statement](#) recognizing the importance of bipartisan efforts and calling upon Congress to move beyond partisan posturing and work toward solutions that advance the country’s interests. This policy brief highlights key parts of the bill.

LEGALIZATION

- Establishes the “Dignity Program” enabling people who are undocumented and have been continuously physically present in the United States since January 1, 2021, to apply for a 7-year temporary legal status. Applicants must register their presence, pass criminal background checks, pay a \$7,000 “restitution” fee and meet other requirements. In the 2025 bill, compared to the previous version, the Dignity Program no longer provides a path to permanent legal status or citizenship. The temporary status can be renewed every 7 years. Beneficiaries are eligible for work authorization and may travel outside the country but are barred from seeking federal benefits or entitlement programs and are required to obtain health insurance.
 - Temporary Protective Status (TPS) recipients are eligible for the Dignity Program and are exempted from the \$7,000 restitution fee.
 - In addition to the restitution fee, a 1% tax will be imposed on the income of Dignity Act beneficiaries to pay for immigration infrastructure and enforcement and to reduce the national debt. Dignity Program participants will be exempt from FICA taxes.
 - Invests in U.S. citizen workers by creating apprenticeship and state grant programs funded by the \$7,000 Dignity Program restitution fees. The bill sponsors estimate the bill will generate at least \$70 billion to support American workers.
- Offers “Dreamers” conditional permanent resident status valid for 10 years, and upon completion of eligibility requirements, the opportunity to apply for lawful permanent resident (LPR) status and eventually citizenship. The program is available to people who are undocumented and arrived in the United States as children (18 years-old or

younger) by January 2021. People with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) protection are also eligible.

BORDER SECURITY AND INTERIOR ENFORCEMENT

- Authorizes and provides funding for operations to secure the border, including new infrastructure and physical barriers, improvements in technology, and increases in surveillance and capacity to improve overall situational awareness at the southern border.
- Improves processing capacity at U.S. ports of entry, including by expanding inspection lanes and mechanisms to safely inspect commercial vehicles.
- Criminal and immigration penalties:
 - Increases criminal penalties for border-related offenses such as unlawful reentry, illicit spotting and other human smuggling activities, carrying a firearm near the border, and destroying surveillance sensors at the border.
 - Imposes severe penalties of up to 30 years imprisonment on people with criminal records who reenter the U.S. unlawfully.
 - Adds severe criminal penalties for asylum fraud of up to 10 years imprisonment.
- Employment enforcement and verification:
 - Modernizes and mandates nationwide use of the E-Verify verification system.
 - Increases penalties on employers for unlawful employment and establishes new penalties for employers and employees who knowingly submit false documents.
 - Modernizes the employment verification paper I-9 process into an electronic process.
 - Provides a “good faith” defense to employers who use the new employment verification process.
 - Authorizes the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to create an office to which state and local governments may submit complaints regarding labor-related violations.

ASYLUM AND HUMANITARIAN PROCESSING

- Establishes an expedited process to process asylum seekers who entered the United States without authorization or request asylum at a port of entry and mandates a 60-day deadline to process nearly all cases. The expedited timeframe, limits on judicial review, and lack of government appointed counsel will significantly compromise fairness and access to humanitarian protection. After the person is identified, there is a 72-hour rest period and an initial screening process within 15 days. The 15-day screening will include a credible fear interview (CFI) as well as background checks, identity verification, and a medical evaluation. Failure to pass the CFI, with very limited exceptions, will lead to immediate removal. Within the total 60-day period, a panel of two asylum officers will decide whether to grant asylum for those determined to have a credible fear. Convention Against Torture, withholding, and complicated cases will be referred to an immigration judge. Otherwise, the bill provides for immigration judge review only in limited circumstances.

- Mandates asylum seekers, with limited exceptions, to be detained at “humanitarian campuses” operated by U.S. Customs and Border Protection during the 60-day fast-tracked process (referred to as ending “catch and release” policy). The humanitarian campuses will provide access to medical, mental health, social services, and legal assistance providers (but not counsel paid for by the government). The bill creates a law school loan forgiveness program for attorneys who provide four years of legal services at humanitarian campuses.
- Requires hiring not fewer than three hundred asylum officers (AOs) to work on expedited determinations at humanitarian campuses.
- In the limited cases that require immigration court review, the DHS will release the person from the humanitarian campus and monitor them through a case management program pending their case resolution.
- Creates processing centers in Latin American countries to offer asylum pre-screening, family reunification services for children, and employment consultation services that could open pathways for applicants to come to the United States.
- Codifies protections for children in U.S. immigration custody as defined in the [“Flores Settlement” agreement](#).

REFORMS TO THE LEGAL IMMIGRATION SYSTEM

- Doubles the current per-country statutory limits on immigrant visas from 7 percent to 15 percent. This will reduce backlogs for larger countries.
- Creates a mechanism to reduce the visa backlog that includes offering premium processing to people who have waited 10 years or more with an approved petition. The premium processing fee is extremely high: \$20,000.
- Reforms the employment-based visa system to stop counting spouses and children who are derivatives of principal visa applicants against the annual employment visa limits.
- Clarifies that an individual with a Ph.D. in a STEM field qualifies for an O-1 “extraordinary ability” visa.
- Permits “dual intent” for students on F-1 visas, which removes a common barrier for students who have difficulty showing they plan to return to their home country after their studies.
- Repeals FICA exemption for foreign students working on Optional Practical Training.
- Protects children legally present in the U.S. from aging out of certain visas due to processing delays.
- Includes provisions proposed in the American Families United Act which provides DHS and the Department of Justice discretion to terminate proceedings or waive certain grounds of inadmissibility for spouses and children of U.S. citizens.
- Specifies another category of visitor visa, “family purposes” to enable foreign relatives of U.S. citizens or LPRs to apply to visit for family purposes, such as weddings or funerals. The U.S. citizen or LPR must apply on behalf of the relative and submit a declaration of support promising to provide full financial support for the visitor, who must also buy travel health insurance.