



County of Monterey

Board of Supervisors
Chambers
168 W. Alisal St., 1st Floor
Salinas, CA 93901

Board Report

File #: OBM 21-025, Version: 1

Consider approval of a recommendation from the Legislative Committee to authorize a letter of support for the U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021. (ADDED VIA ADDENDUM)

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors consider approval of a recommendation from the Legislative Committee to authorize a letter of support for the U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021.

SUMMARY:

In anticipation of the introduction of federal immigration reform legislation, on February 8, 2021 the Legislative Committee directed that as soon as legislation was introduced that consideration of a support position immediately be placed on the Board of Supervisors' agenda. On February 18, 2021, Congresswoman Linda T. Sánchez (CA-38) and U.S. Senator Bob Menendez (D-NJ) introduced the bicameral U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021, President Biden's framework for the future of the United States immigration system. U.S. Senator Alex Padilla (D-CA) joined as chief cosponsor, U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) joined as an original cosponsor, and Congressman Jimmy Panetta (CA-20) joined as an original cosponsor.

DISCUSSION:

The U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021 would provide millions of hardworking, undocumented immigrants with a pathway to earned citizenship, including Dreamers, Temporary Protective Status (TPS) recipients, and essential workers who have made enormous sacrifices during the pandemic; prioritize family reunification and keeping families together; and bolster the country's long-term economic growth. The bill would also equip the country to responsibly and effectively manage the border with smart and effective investments, address root causes of migration that force people to leave Central America, and restore the United States' commitment to human rights.

The [2/18/21 Press Release <https://lindasanchez.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/s-nchez-menendez-introduce-bicameral-us-citizenship-act-2021-overhaul>](https://lindasanchez.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/s-nchez-menendez-introduce-bicameral-us-citizenship-act-2021-overhaul) provided by Rep. Sánchez's provides the following highlights of the [U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021 <https://lindasanchez.house.gov/sites/lindasanchez.house.gov/files/2021.02.18%20US%20Citizenship%20Act%20Bill%20Text%20-%20SIGNED.pdf>](https://lindasanchez.house.gov/sites/lindasanchez.house.gov/files/2021.02.18%20US%20Citizenship%20Act%20Bill%20Text%20-%20SIGNED.pdf):

- **Creates an earned roadmap to citizenship for all 11 million undocumented immigrants**, providing Dreamers, TPS holders, and some farmworkers with an expedited three-year path to citizenship, and giving all other undocumented immigrants who pass background checks and pay taxes with an eight-year path to citizenship without fear of deportation.
- **Reforms family-based immigration system to keep families together** by recapturing visas from previous years to clear backlogs, including spouses and children of green card holders as immediate family members, and increasing per-country caps for family-based immigration. It also eliminates discrimination facing LGBTQ+ families, provides protections for orphans, widows and children, allows immigrants with approved family-sponsorship petitions to join family in the U.S. on a temporary basis

while they wait for green cards to become available.

- **Grows our economy** by making changes to the employment-based immigration system, eliminating per-country caps, making it easier for STEM advanced degree holders from U.S. universities to stay, improving access to green cards for workers in lower-wage industries, and giving dependents of H-1B holders work authorization, and preventing children of H-1B holders from aging out of the system. The bill also creates a pilot program to stimulate regional economic development and incentivizes higher wages for non-immigrant, high-skilled visas to prevent unfair competition with American workers.
- **Increases fundings for immigrant integration initiatives** and supports state and local governments, NGOs, and other community organizations that conduct inclusion programs, provide English language assistance, and make available naturalization resources to immigrant communities.
- **Protects workers from exploitation and improves the employment verification process** by requiring the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of Labor to establish a commission involving labor, employer, and civil rights organizations to help improve the employment verification process and granting workers who suffer serious labor violations greater access to U visa relief.
- **Supports asylum seekers and other vulnerable populations** by eliminating the one-year deadline for filing asylum claims, reducing asylum application backlogs, increasing protections for U visa, T visa, and VAWA applicants, including by raising the cap on U visas from 10,000 to 30,000.

The U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021 also addresses the root causes of migration and prioritizes U.S. national security:

- **Addresses the root causes of migration** from Central America by funding the President's four-year plan to increase assistance to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras conditioned on their ability to reduce the corruption, violence, poverty, and famine that now causes people to flee.
- **Creates safe and legal channels** for people to seek protection, so they can apply for legal status in Central America instead of making the dangerous journey north. The bill also re-institutes the Central American Minors program to reunite children with U.S. relatives and creates a Central American Family Reunification Parole Program to more quickly unite families with approved family sponsorship petitions.
- **Cracks down on bad actors** by enhancing the ability to prosecute individuals involved in smuggling, narcotics and trafficking networks who are responsible for drugs flowing into our country and the exploitation of migrants. It will also expand transnational anti-gang task forces in Central America.
- **Improves the immigration courts and protects vulnerable individuals** by expanding family case management programs, reducing immigration court backlogs, expanding training for immigration judges, and improving technology for immigration courts. It also restores fairness and balance to our immigration system by providing judges and adjudicators with discretion to review cases and grant relief to deserving individuals, and also gives funding for school districts educating unaccompanied children.
- **Modernizes and manages the border** effectively through the use of technology that enhances our ability to detect contraband and counter transnational criminal networks since illicit drugs are most likely to be smuggled through legal ports of entry. It also authorizes and provides funding for plans to improve infrastructure at ports of entry to enhance the ability to process asylum seekers and detect, interdict, disrupt and prevent narcotics from entering the United States.
- **Protects border communities** by providing for additional rescue beacons to prevent needless deaths along the border, requiring agent training and oversight to investigate criminal and administrative misconduct, and requiring department-wide policies governing the use of force. It also authorizes and provides funding for DHS, in coordination with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)

and nongovernmental experts, to develop guidelines and protocols for standards of care for individuals, families, and children in CBP custody.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVMENT:

The County Administrative Office - Intergovernmental & Legislative Affairs Division (CAO-IGLA) prepared this report with the assistance of the County's federal legislative advocate, Brent Heberlee of Ballard Spahr LLP.

FINANCING:

Monterey County's Legislative Program is funded in County Administrative Office-Department 1050, Intergovernmental & Legislative Affairs Division-Unit 8054. Approval of this recommendation will not result in additional general fund contributions.

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS STRATEGIC INITIATIVES:

Mark a check to the related Board of Supervisors Strategic Initiatives

- Economic Development
- Administration
- Health & Human Services
- Infrastructure
- Public Safety

Prepared by: Annette D'Adamo, Legislative Coordinator (MAIII)

Approved by: Nicholas E. Chiulos, Assistant CAO

Date: February 18, 2021

Attachment:

- Draft letter of support - US Citizenship Act of 2021