

## **Coronavirus Resilience Workforce Agenda**

The coronavirus pandemic means that we are now living in a disaster economy. The federal government's relief efforts may provide some temporary stability for American workers and businesses. But a real recovery will depend on how we strengthen our economy for the long term. That's going to mean investing in the right kinds of workers, right now.

America needs to support, protect, and expand what we call the Resilience Workforce.

These are the millions of people who go to work in and after major disasters. They power our response and drive our recovery. They are builders, caregivers, and social-service workers. After natural disasters, they clean up debris, repair downed power lines, and provide hot meals for people in emergency evacuation shelters. In the current pandemic crisis, they are disinfecting ICUs, retrofitting hotels into temporary hospitals, delivering groceries to vulnerable residents who can't leave their homes. Maintaining society's most essential functions, so that the rest of us can shelter in place.

The stronger this workforce is, the better our society is able to ride out and rebuild from disasters. We may not be used to thinking of them as a single workforce, but they share in common an indispensable role in sustaining us through times of crisis. These are the men and women who enable the rest of us to keep calm and carry on.

But while they labor on the front lines of the pandemic, these workers are also vulnerable—to sickness, to job loss, to crises of their own, all of which threatens their ability to continue their vital work. We need this workforce to be safe and stable. And we need it to grow.

On the other side of our immediate health crisis are double-digit unemployment numbers: millions of workers laid off from service-sector jobs that may never come back. With the right support, they could become part of the expanded Resilience Workforce our society needs—building security and stability for generations to come.

One truth about our current Resilience Workforce: it could not exist without immigrants. They repair our homes after hurricanes and are getting ready to retrofit hotels to turn them into makeshift hospitals. One out of six medical professionals is foreign-born. Other essential workers are immigrants, as well: farmworkers, meatpackers, maintenance and transport workers, food preparation and delivery workers, and the workers caring for elders, children and others. An "us vs. them" mindset about immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers is at cross-purposes with our nation's recovery. We are all in this together.

Congress should invest in, support, and expand the resilience workforce in the following ways:

**Resilience Corps** Congress should create a New Deal-style, federally funded national service corps and jobs program called the Resilience Corps. The Corps would stream millions of Americans into critical roles in essential industries that are connected to disaster response and recovery.

It should be modeled on our nation's response to another disaster -- the Great Depression. During the New Deal, the Works Progress Administration employed 8.5 million people and supported 30 million of their dependents at a federal cost of \$90 billion (in 2018 dollars) over eight years, with an additional \$9-27 billion from states and localities.

- The Corps should include training and apprenticeship programs that put millions of Americans on professional paths.
- The Corps should encourage the broadest possible participation, including people with past criminal convictions, noncitizens, and undocumented immigrants. We need all the help we can get.
- The Resilience Corps should become part of America's permanent disaster-response infrastructure. On the other side of the COVID-19 curve, we face the ongoing climate-related disasters that grow more frequent and intense every year: hurricanes, floods, and fires. This workforce will increase our resilience by rebuilding infrastructure, strengthening our public health systems, and helping cities adapt to climate change before and after disasters.
- A small version of this program already exists in the FEMA Cadre of On Call and Response (CORE) and FEMA Reservist programs.

As a first step, we aim to expand these programs by opening them to all Americans, regardless of immigration status.

### **Match the Needs of Employers with the Immigrant Resilience**

**Workforce** Among the Americans at work in frontline professions are millions of immigrant workers, including the undocumented. They are risking their own health and safety to contain the coronavirus and to allow the disaster economy to move forward.

They include health care workers, janitors who disinfect hospitals and essential workplaces, farmworkers, truck drivers, grocery store workers and delivery drivers who keep food and medicine flowing, construction workers building temporary medical facilities, childcare and elder care workers. We need these workers to be safe, to keep working so we can stay home. And we need millions more to join their ranks. For this reason, we call on Congress to:

- Lighten the burden on employers. Congress should temporarily suspend the outdated immigration paperwork requirements that burden employers and slow hiring. Streamline the Form I-9 process and expand the documents workers can use in the process.
- Stop all immigration-related raids of homes and businesses during this time of national crisis. Fear of raids makes workers less likely to seek treatment if they're sick or to report to work when they're able. In this moment, everyone living in America needs to be able to reach out for help.

### **Recognize and Reward the Immigrant Part of Coronavirus Response with Legal Status**

Millions of workers will fight to contain the virus and help us respond and recover. Some will work in the private sector, some through volunteerism, and some through the newly created Resilience Corps. As noted above, many of them will be undocumented or have precarious immigration statuses, such as through DACA.

We call on Congress to create a permanent immigration status in recognition of immigrants' service on the front lines of the coronavirus pandemic. The new status should not preclude eventual permanent

residency and a path to citizenship.

**Conclusion** The medical and economic disaster of this pandemic will be with us for a long time to come. There will be fierce debate in the coming months over how best to spend the trillions of dollars being invested in stimulus and recovery—with impacts that we will feel for generations.

Building the Resilience Workforce is a powerful way to put America back to work, protect one another, and rebuild our critical infrastructure all at once. Our future rests on making resilience a top priority and recognizing that we need each other to make it happen.