



Building a Just Immigration System in America

Policy Brief – One Big Beautiful Bill Act

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Background	4
How This Bill Will Harm Migrant Communities	6
Recommendations	9
Conclusion	14
Works Cited	15

Executive Summary

At a time when the United States faces mounting pressure to modernize its immigration system with humanity and pragmatism, the so-called “Big Beautiful Bill” (H.R. 1) represents a sweeping overhaul of immigration policy, proposing an unparalleled expansion of federal enforcement through Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and U.S. Border Patrol.

If enacted, this bill would allocate over \$170 billion toward border militarization, detention infrastructure, and deportation operations, including funding for the removal of up to one million immigrants annually. This dangerous piece of legislation seeks to strip away critical services and protections from families who are already part of our communities. Its aggressive enforcement strategy diverts resources away from more effective and humane approaches.

Instead of criminalizing and targeting immigrant communities, policymakers should oppose H.R. 1’s punitive framework and invest in community-based solutions that uphold due process, protect human rights, and address the root causes of immigration. Repealing or redirecting the enforcement provisions in H.R. 1 is essential to building an equitable and functional immigration system.

This legislation does not simply seek to manage immigration; it seeks to punish immigrants. It weaponizes taxpayer dollars to inflict pain, fear, and separation on millions of families, undermining American values of liberty, justice, and due process. This bill is not an immigration solution; it is a humanitarian crisis in the making.

Rather than investing in harm and division, Congress must pursue a forward-looking, evidence-based immigration strategy that centers humanity, equity, and effective governance. This brief calls for a complete rejection of H.R. 1’s enforcement-first approach and recommends redirecting funds toward asylum processing, legal representation, humanitarian aid, and

long-term integration strategies that actually work.

By dismantling the most extreme provisions of this bill and investing in people and communities—not detention—we can uphold our values and build an immigration system rooted in dignity and fairness.

Background

Nations often define themselves not by the borders they enforce but by the values they uphold when those borders are put to the test. Immigration policy is a reflection of a country's identity—its willingness to balance law with compassion, security with dignity, and sovereignty with shared humanity. In the United States, that balance has continually been challenged, shaped by political dynamics, economic needs, and deep cultural narratives. For years, lawmakers have struggled to find a consensus on how to manage immigration in a way that is both orderly and just. Yet every attempt reveals the same fundamental question: whether to treat migrants as contributors to society or as threats to be contained.

While the founders of the Americas envisioned a society that valued self-governance and protection for all citizens, the United States has often failed to live up to these ideals, particularly regarding the exclusion of minority groups such as Native Americans, women, and, more recently, undocumented immigrants (Tony Williams, *Declaration of Independence, and Principle That All Men Are Created Equal*). The foundational documents of the United States, including the *Declaration of Independence* and the *Constitution*, clearly emphasize equality and the belief in universal natural rights. These principles have historically drawn those seeking liberty and opportunity, embodying the original promise of the Declaration.

However, federal and state laws have frequently prioritized enforcement over compassion, contradicting the nation's stated commitment to liberty and equality for all. For instance, the Immigration Act of 1924 limited the number of immigrants allowed entry into the United States

through the origins quota system, which granted immigration visas to only two percent of the total number of people of each nationality already residing in the country. This system effectively excluded immigrants from Asia. While the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 removed explicit racial bars to citizenship, it preserved the quota framework until 1965. Additionally, laws such as the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996 and the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA) of 1996 expanded the grounds for detention and deportation, while encouraging local police collaboration with federal immigration enforcement.

Under current policy, immigration enforcement already consumes a substantial share of federal resources. As of Fiscal Year 2024, ICE's annual budget totaled approximately \$9 billion. Under the "Big Beautiful Bill," funding for Detention and Removal Operations (DRO) would reach \$45 billion to expand detention centers for immigrants. Additionally, enforcement and deportation operations received \$29.9 billion to support large-scale deportation efforts and the recruitment of new agents (*What's in the Big Beautiful Bill? Immigration and Border Security Unpacked*, 2025). This allocation would make ICE the most heavily funded law enforcement agency in the nation, doubling detention capacity to over 100,000 detainees at any given time and adding approximately \$11.25 billion per year (Heidi Altman et al., 2025).

The new law would also impose a series of new fees on migrants. Beginning July 22, 2025, immigration application fees will increase, including an added 3.2% charge on international money transfers for non-U.S. citizens. Asylum seekers, who are currently exempt from application fees, would be required to pay a new \$1,000 filing fee, making it nearly impossible for children, low-income individuals, and those unable to work to apply for protection. Individuals with parole or temporary protection status would face a \$550 biannual fee for their work permits. Furthermore, sponsors of migrant children would be required to pay an \$8,500 up-front fee, resulting in longer detention periods for many minors who lack financial sponsors.

While current federal law permits a maximum fine of \$250 for unauthorized border crossings, the proposed bill would raise that penalty to \$5,000 for each person apprehended by Border Patrol (Aaron Reichlin-Melnick, 2025).

Therefore, while funding for border security, immigration processing, and enforcement is being increased, programs that directly benefit immigrants will be significantly reduced. For example, access to health care through Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) will be revoked on October 1, 2026. Health care access through the Affordable Care Act (ACA) will end on January 1, 2027, and Medicare coverage will be revoked on January 27, 2027 (*How the "Big Beautiful Bill" Impacts Newcomers*, 2025).

Currently, benefits such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, ACA coverage, and Medicare are scheduled to become unavailable within one to two years for many lawfully present immigrants, including humanitarian parolees, refugees, and asylees without green cards (Heidi Altman et al., 2025). These cuts will disproportionately affect families already navigating financial hardship and instability, leaving vulnerable populations without essential medical and nutritional support.

How This Bill Will Harm Migrant Communities

As fear spreads through migrant families due to the threat of mass deportations, their overall health and well-being continue to decline. Many parents may stop taking their children to school out of fear of being detained or deported, disrupting children's education and development. Interrupting a child's education can have lasting mental and physical effects, stunting both academic growth and emotional stability.

The consequences are not limited to undocumented families. Mixed-status families—those with both documented and undocumented members—are also experiencing rising levels of stress, anxiety, and health problems as they live under constant fear of separation (Monica Saucedo et

al., 2025). Children of migrant parents, regardless of age, are being forced to abandon normal routines and step into adult responsibilities to support their families.

Families have reported that college-bound students have changed their education plans, while others have developed depression or seen existing health conditions worsen. Many must now balance caring for siblings or managing finances because their parents fear leaving for work and not returning home (Akash Pillai et al., 2025).

Many families have lost their primary providers due to ongoing mass deportations, and the broader economy has also suffered. Immigrants, who make up a significant portion of the nation's workforce, are being removed from their jobs and placed in detention centers. This large-scale removal of workers is already negatively affecting vital industries such as construction, agriculture, transportation, and manufacturing.

In major states such as California and Texas, where immigrants make up roughly 40 percent of the construction workforce, deportations would create severe labor shortages and leave lasting gaps in the economy (Tony Payan et al., 2025). Continuing to deport these workers is projected to reduce the gross domestic product by 2.6 to 6.2 percent over the next decade, lower wages, limit job opportunities, and decrease tax revenues at every level of government (Tony Payan et al., 2025).

Although immigrants are essential to the U.S. economy, this hostile legislation treats them as liabilities rather than assets. Without undocumented labor, consumer prices are expected to rise by 9.1 percent by 2028, while overall employment will decline by 7 percent (*Mass Deportations Would Deliver a Catastrophic Blow to the U.S. Economy*, 2025). Migrant communities are vital to U.S.-born citizens. They contribute substantially to the nation's fiscal health, paying an estimated \$237,000 more in taxes than they receive in benefits. Without their continued participation in the workforce, critical programs such as Medicare and Social Security would face significant funding

cuts, as these workers are among their primary contributors.

Despite the clear and measurable economic benefits provided by immigrant communities, the “Big Beautiful Bill” disregards both common sense and human welfare in favor of punitive ideology. It prioritizes the expansion of detention and deportation infrastructure over policies that promote inclusion, integration, and economic stability. These provisions fail to recognize that immigration is not a threat but a driving force of growth and innovation that strengthens the United States.

The cost of ignoring this reality extends beyond economic losses. It inflicts lasting harm on families, destabilizes communities, and erodes the nation’s moral foundation. By diverting billions of dollars into enforcement and incarceration rather than support and integration, this legislation will not only devastate immigrant families but also undermine the very social and economic institutions it claims to protect, affecting the well-being of all U.S. citizens.

Reports from international and domestic settings demonstrate that immigration detention severely harms the physical and mental health of those who experience it. Yet it remains one of the primary developments that would expand under this bill (Chanelle Diaz et al., 2022). It is important to note that although detention centers have existed for centuries, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) states that immigration detention “should normally be avoided and be a measure of last resort.”

Research highlights the extreme vulnerabilities and poor health conditions of many individuals held in immigration detention. Documented reports describe abhorrent human rights abuses occurring within ICE facilities (Rohan Borschmann et al., 2024). One particularly concerning practice is family detention, which medical and mental health experts condemn as causing “psychological trauma and long-term mental health risks” to children, even when used for short durations.

Another dangerous provision likely to be reinstated under the Trump administration is expedited removal. This policy allows immigration officers to deport individuals without a hearing before an immigration judge, effectively denying them due process (*Know Your Rights: Prepare for Trump's Mass Deportation Threats*, 2025). Such actions undermine constitutional principles and violate international human rights standards.

Although viable alternatives to detention exist, such as community-based case management programs, these initiatives have received little to no support from ICE or the administration. During Trump's first term, the Family Case Management Program—a cost-efficient initiative that operated at just 4 percent of ICE's family detention costs—was terminated despite its success. The program demonstrated high compliance rates and significantly reduced public spending while supporting social and economic stability. Studies further indicate that expanding such programs could reduce childhood poverty and strengthen community integration (Patricia Malagon, 2024).

Recommendations

1. Restore Access to Essential Public Benefits

Congress should restore access to essential public benefits, including healthcare, food assistance, and tax credits, for migrant communities. This approach is grounded in human rights, reduces disparities, and yields both public health and economic benefits.

For example, California—home to one of the largest immigrant populations in the country—expanded healthcare coverage for low-income children regardless of immigration status. This policy led to a 34 percent decrease in the uninsured rate (KFF, 2025). Research consistently shows that immigrants, regardless of status, use less healthcare than U.S.-born citizens. This is partly because immigrants tend to be younger and healthier but also reflects the systemic barriers they face, including higher uninsured rates, language barriers, confusion about

eligibility, and fear related to immigration status.

As a result, immigrants have lower healthcare expenditures. According to 2021 data from the Kaiser Family Foundation, average annual per capita healthcare spending for immigrants was about two-thirds that of U.S.-born citizens (\$4,875 versus \$7,277). Moreover, immigrants contribute billions of dollars in insurance premiums and taxes each year, while their lower usage of care helps subsidize the U.S. healthcare system and offset costs for U.S.-born citizens.

Expanding benefits to these communities would not create a financial burden; instead, it would honor their contributions and strengthen the healthcare infrastructure for everyone (KFF, 2025).

2. Protect and Expand the Child Tax Credit

In 2021, the expanded Child Tax Credit (CTC) demonstrated the power of inclusive policy and its ability to transform lives. The CTC reached families with little to no income, resulting in the largest recorded one-year drop in child poverty in U.S. history (Jillian McKoy, 2025).

This policy not only reduced poverty but also directly improved public health outcomes. A longitudinal study published in *JAMA Network Open* found that caregivers who received the CTC were less likely to experience anxiety, food insecurity, or housing instability (Jillian McKoy, 2025). These improvements extended to children's well-being, as their caregivers' improved mental health, housing stability, and food security were directly linked to healthier development, better academic performance, and long-term social benefits.

However, H.R. 1 threatens the well-being of low-income families and U.S. citizen children living in mixed-status households by denying them access to essential supports such as the CTC.

Restoring and expanding these programs is vital to promoting family stability, reducing generational poverty, and ensuring that every child—regardless of their parents' status—has the opportunity to thrive.

To promote health equity, economic stability, and long-term well-being for all U.S. residents, Congress should expand inclusive programs that support every family, regardless of immigration or tax-filing status. Immigrant households—many of which include U.S.-born children—contribute billions of dollars annually in payroll and income taxes, yet they are frequently excluded from the benefits funded by their own labor.

Policymakers should focus on eliminating minimum income requirements, restoring eligibility for families who file taxes using Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITINs), and ensuring that mixed-status households are included in any extension of government assistance. Doing so would reduce child poverty, strengthen public institutions, and generate long-term economic returns through greater community participation and reduced reliance on emergency services. Investing in these communities is not only a moral imperative but also a fiscally responsible and socially beneficial choice.

Although H.R. 1 seeks to diminish essential programs, expanding immigrant eligibility for public benefits will ultimately strengthen the nation. When immigrant families have access to low-cost programs, they are more financially stable and more likely to reinvest in their local economies.

Organizations such as Protecting Immigrant Families (PIF) have been instrumental in educating Congress about the need to make programs like SNAP, CHIP, and Medicaid accessible to immigrant households. Their advocacy highlights the harm caused by restrictive policies such as the “five-year bar,” a rule enacted in 1996 that prevents many immigrants from accessing federal benefits during their first five years in the United States. PIF continues to advocate for the passage of the LIFT the BAR Act, introduced by Representative Pramila Jayapal and Senator Mazie Hirono, which would eliminate this exclusion and extend critical care to immigrant families.

The National Immigration Law Center (NILC) has also played a vital role in documenting and expanding healthcare access for immigrant communities nationwide. One of its key tools is a

comprehensive table that maps how different states use their authority to extend health coverage to immigrants, particularly children and pregnant women. The table identifies which states have chosen to expand federal programs to include immigrant populations and which have used state funding to fill the gaps left by federal restrictions. These examples demonstrate that state-level action, supported by sufficient resources, can effectively bridge inequities and ensure that all families—regardless of status—receive essential care and protection (Tanya Broder, 2025).

3. Use Alternatives to Detention Centers

The federal government should reduce its reliance on immigration detention and instead invest in community-based alternatives that are less harmful to migrants, more cost-effective, and more conducive to long-term compliance and integration.

Evidence consistently shows that community-based programs are safer, less expensive, and far more effective than detention-centered approaches. Studies have found that alternatives to detention (ATD) maintain average compliance rates of 90 percent or higher while costing up to 80 percent less than traditional detention (*A Better Way: Community-Based Programming as an Alternative to Immigration Incarceration*, 2019). These programs operate within the communities where participants reside and are typically managed by nonprofit organizations that are closely connected to local resources and support networks. This approach builds trust between participants and institutions, creating voluntary compliance rather than fear-driven enforcement (*Alternatives to Immigration Detention: An Overview*, 2023).

Two effective models of community-based programming include the **Appearance Assistance Program (AAP)** and the **Family Case Management Program (FCMP)**.

The **Appearance Assistance Program**, which operated from 1997 through 2000, provided legal orientations, court hearing reminders, and referrals for legal representation to over 500 immigrants and asylum seekers. Of those participants, 91 percent attended all of their court

hearings—compared to only 71 percent of nonparticipants—and compliance with final orders was nearly double (69 percent versus 38 percent) (*Community Supervision Proves Detention Is Unnecessary to Ensure Appearance at Immigration Hearings*, 2020). The program demonstrated that intensive supervision and legal education could ensure compliance without resorting to detention. Moreover, the cost of supervision was 55 percent lower for asylum seekers and 15 percent lower for individuals in deportation proceedings with criminal convictions.

The **Family Case Management Program (FCMP)**, implemented by ICE from January 2016 through June 2017, was another successful ATD initiative. Operating in major metropolitan areas such as Baltimore/Washington, Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, and New York, the program enrolled 952 families before its termination by the Trump administration. FCMP was founded on the principle that individualized case management improves participants' understanding of the immigration process and encourages compliance without punitive monitoring measures.

The outcomes of FCMP were remarkable. Of participating families, 99.3 percent attended their court hearings, 99.4 percent attended ICE appointments, and 100 percent complied with immigration court proceedings (*Women's Refugee Commission*). The program also proved highly cost-effective, costing approximately \$38 per family per day—compared to nearly \$320 per person per day for ICE family detention. Despite its success, the program was abruptly terminated, leaving many families vulnerable to separation or renewed detention.

These examples demonstrate that community-based alternatives to detention not only uphold the rule of law but also achieve higher compliance rates, lower costs, and better humanitarian outcomes. Investing in such programs would reflect both fiscal responsibility and moral leadership while building a more humane and effective immigration system.

4. Strengthen Community-Based Programs

Another model worth expanding is the **Marie Joseph House**, operated by the Interfaith

Community for Detained Immigrants (ICDI) in Chicago, Illinois. This program provides food, housing, and comprehensive case management support for asylum seekers immediately after their release from immigration detention (*A Better Way: Community-Based Programming as an Alternative to Immigration Incarceration*, 2019). ICDI staff and volunteers enhance these services through partnerships with other nonprofit organizations across the Chicago area, efficiently connecting participants with community resources (*Know Your Rights*, 2025).

This holistic model ensures that asylum seekers and immigrants receive the guidance, information, and tools they need to navigate their immigration cases successfully. ICDI's work has also produced a positive ripple effect across the broader community, as volunteers and residents engage with diverse cultures and traditions, fostering empathy and understanding. Over its 16 years of service, ICDI has reunited more than 400 families and engaged over 150 active volunteers. The program exemplifies how compassionate, community-driven models can support integration while strengthening civic and cultural cohesion.

Conclusion

The “Big Beautiful Bill” represents one of the most sweeping and punitive immigration enforcement efforts in recent U.S. history, prioritizing mass deportation, detention expansion, and defunding of essential programs over meaningful reform. As outlined in this brief, such legislation undermines human rights, weakens social safety nets, and inflicts lasting harm on immigrant families and U.S.-born citizens alike. With countless lives and livelihoods at stake, the United States must not allow cruelty to replace governance. Policymakers must shift priorities toward inclusive, community-based models that protect families, ensure due process, and uphold the nation's core values.

To create a forward-looking America, immigration strategies must recognize the urgent need to invest in migrant communities rather than criminalize them. Expanding access to federal benefits,

restoring programs like the Child Tax Credit (CTC), and replacing mass detention with proven, community-based alternatives would strengthen both public trust and economic participation.

The provisions in H.R. 1 fail to deliver humane or effective responses to immigration challenges. Instead, they channel billions into detention and deportation while ignoring data-backed, cost-efficient solutions that already work. If Congress truly seeks to reform immigration in line with American ideals, it must reject these extreme measures and invest in policies that recognize immigrants as people—integral to the social and economic fabric of the nation.

The United States stands at a crossroads: it can continue investing in incarceration, division, and harm, or it can choose inclusion, dignity, and unity. The path forward is clear. Building a safer, stronger, and more compassionate future begins with policies that honor every individual who calls this country home.

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