

Nebraska Alliance for Thriving Communities

Positive immigration solutions for strong Nebraska communities, families, & workforce

Key Context:

- **It has been 38 years** since Congress has meaningfully updated our immigration laws, causing unnecessary harm to local families, employers, and communities. (Other countries update on an ongoing basis.)
- **The U.S. and Nebraska have a substantial need for more people over the next several decades** as Baby Boomers retire and the [ratio of seniors to prime working age adults](#) continues to increase in every state.
- Effective border governance requires a foundation of updated, workable immigration laws that serve the interests of local communities across the country. Together we can also reimagine border policies that complement updated immigration laws, prioritize humanitarian ports of entry, and ensure vetting processes for goods and the movement of people through a safe and dignified process.

Nebraska stakeholder perspectives:

What we need...

- **Permanency** (long-term need, not short-term)
- **Families** (not just individuals) to sustain whole communities
- **Stability** (for longtime community members, employers, families, & whole communities)
- **Many more people across the skills spectrum** for Nebraska's next chapter
- **Simpler, workable** immigration processes in a reasonable amount of time
- Related **investments in state infrastructure** that will welcome and retain new and longtime people.

Examples of local impact (of outdated immigration laws)

Click [here](#) to read stories and descriptions from Nebraska partners and stakeholders.

- **Extreme workforce strain** – not only for core jobs but throughout related support systems.
- **Constant instability & uncertainty** for families, employers, and whole communities.
- **Worrisome impacts on community life** – inability to provide everyday services that both urban and rural communities need to thrive

Federal Policy Needs:

- **Create immediate stability for employers and longtime community members** who are doing critical work and have been part of the fabric of local communities for many years.
 - Create a way for longtime community members to apply for permanent residency, such as an update to the Registry date (a provision with a long bipartisan history already part of the law)
 - Create a way for Dreamers and TPS residents to apply for permanent residency.
- **Increase & streamline immigrant visas available (family-based and employment-based)** for Nebraska's long-term community and workforce needs.
 - Increase the number of family-based visas (per year).
 - Increase family visa #s by not counting dependents against the current caps.
 - Discontinue the unnecessary 3-year, 10-year, and permanent bars to reentry that separate families and create barriers to applying for family-based visas.
 - Expand & streamline employment-based immigrant visa programs
 - For example, increase EB-3 visas for people who work in high demand fields, such as agriculture, healthcare/long term care, manufacturing, construction, education/childcare, and hospitality.
 - For example, pursue "state's interest waiver" for states with low rates of unemployment that streamline the hiring process (similar to National Interest Waiver).
 - Create a way for agricultural workers to apply for permanent residency.

- **Improve temporary visa programs**
 - Grant work authorization to spouses and working aged children of temporary, non-immigrant visa holders (to increase workforce through people already here and to solve family struggles related to inability to work).
 - Eliminate the seasonal requirement for agricultural employers under the H-2A program.
 - Create clearer avenues to adjust from temporary to permanent (non-immigrant to immigrant).
 - Allow visa-holders to self-petition for permanent residence after a short provisional period (to prevent employers' loss of training/investment, reduce constant administrative burden, and prevent social problems of a long-term temporary population).
 - Create a way for humanitarian programs and other temporary visas to apply for permanent residency.
 - Expand work authorization for those on student visas.
- **Improve asylum and refugee processes** as well as additional humanitarian programs.
 - Increase refugee admissions and streamline processes. Shorten the long waiting period between permanency and applying for citizenship for refugees and approved asylees who have already been through extensive vetting.
 - Create consistency across various humanitarian programs (Ukraine, Afghanistan, Haiti, Venezuela, for example)
 - Reduce long wait times for work authorization for asylum applicants.
- **Increase immigration processing infrastructure & simplify/streamline** process and backlogs.
 - Federal funding for USCIS (DHS), DOJ, DOL, and DOS to increase staffing, accountability, & processing capabilities.
 - Increase/enhance ports of entry to ensure humane and efficient screening, and continue pilot programs for processing options in other countries to relieve pressures at the southern border.

State Policy Needs:

State policies that support quality, affordable housing, child care, and transportation – and that create welcoming communities of belonging – benefit all Nebraskans. By investing in the following areas, Nebraska can better retain and attract people – and support the workforce and families who sustain the community systems used by all:

Housing: Nebraska currently faces a substantial need for housing that is affordable for working families: [Statewide](#) there are only [77 units affordable and available](#) for every 100 renters with incomes at 50% of the area median. In 2022, 34% of the 32,000 Nebraskans who moved out of Nebraska [cited](#) housing as the reason for their move. Recruiting the additional community members Nebraska needs for more than 50,000 job vacancies will create an even greater need for future housing.

Building the housing Nebraska needs and ensuring housing access faces several barriers:

- The cost of getting building materials to rural communities.
- Securing developers who can build larger numbers of units.
- A shortage of affordable smaller units and affordable single-family homes.
- Workforce to build new housing and maintain existing housing.

To overcome those barriers, Nebraska state policy should:

- Increase state funding to develop and build affordable and middle-income housing in rural and urban communities.
- Ensure TIF is utilized as a tool to add additional affordable housing units in Nebraska.

Childcare: Nebraska communities face a severe shortage of quality, affordable childcare. More children need care than licensed facilities can handle, childcare centers are struggling to staff their classrooms, and in-home providers are burned

out ([“The Childcare Desert”, 2023](#)). Additionally, many community members don’t have access to childcare due to nontraditional work hours or specific language needs other than English. Childcare costs are out of reach. [Nationally](#), the average price of center-based care exceeds the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ [definition of affordable](#) (7% of household income).

Barriers to increasing quality affordable childcare options include:

- **Workforce:** Recruiting and retaining staff (30% turnover, median wage of only \$13.34, background-check delays of several weeks)
- **Capacity:** Nebraska needs more than 20,000 additional slots to meet the needs of working parents of children under 6. And with staffing shortages and infrastructure costs, current providers are barely hanging on.
- **Cost:** On average, infant care, which is the most expensive care, costs Nebraska families more than \$12,000 annually.
- **Language access:** The majority of the information on DHHS’ website regarding the requirements for opening a childcare program is not translated into Spanish or other languages. The same is true for many required licensure trainings, enrollment documents for families, and the state’s only statewide child care referral system, which shows all available child care slots.

To overcome those barriers, Nebraska state policy should:

- Increase tax credits for parents and for businesses that support childcare (through subsidizing the cost of care for employees or through providing care on-site).
- Increase investment in opening & growth of quality affordable childcare facilities.
- Provide DHHS with more funding to ensure better language-access materials and support for community members seeking to open childcare facilities – through DHHS staffing and forms available in Spanish & other languages.
- Increase infrastructure for processing background checks.
- Provide grants to communities to offer nontraditional care (overnight care, nontraditional hours).

Transportation: Nebraska is a state with few public transportation options, creating barriers for both new and longtime community members. Getting to work, taking kids to school, buying groceries, and other family needs generally requires a car. Because Nebraska’s roads are safest when all Nebraska drivers are licensed, tested, and insured, Nebraska state policy can:

- Expand driver’s license access (based on the ability to drive and knowledge of rules of the road).
- Invest in transportation options for seniors and working people without cars.
- Ensure all DMVs go through annual training in order to avoid unnecessary barriers that come out of complex and varied immigration statuses.

Welcoming: Many communities across Nebraska are developing creative local practices and proactive planning to build strong, stable, inclusive communities where everyone knows they belong and can contribute their talents.

In addition to these important local efforts, state policy can...

- Improve the transfer of professional licenses/certifications
- Invest resources for New Nebraskan Centers
- Ensure unemployment insurance access for community members with TPS/DACA
- Reverse Nebraska’s position seeking to end DACA, and oppose future litigation that would damage Nebraska’s ability to recruit and retain working families.

[SHORT SUMMARY HERE](#)