



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

August 28, 2023

RECEIVED

By ESEC at 1:48 pm, Aug 28, 2023

To the Honorable Secretary Mayorkas:

Since the arrival of the first “Operation Texas” bus in August of 2022, the State of Illinois and the City of Chicago have spent and obligated over \$250 million to help welcome and support the more than 13,000 asylum seekers who have traveled to Chicago from the US-Mexico border. As we continue to receive new arrivals who often lack sponsors, shelter, and have no immediate legal pathways to work, we have come to understand that this is not a short-term crisis, but rather a long-term reality.

As a result, our focus as city, state, and federal systems must pivot away from emergency responses that have already reached unsustainable levels towards policies that will enable individuals to live with dignity. We must build a system that can safely and capably receive the growing number of new arrivals who seek shelter in our city and state; there is no path to success without significant new federal financial support and immigration policy changes.

Today, we write to you to respectfully request that the Department of Homeland Security leverage its authority to grant parole through the “Significant Public Benefit” designation to create a process for streamlined work authorization in which states could sponsor non-citizens to work in industries facing labor shortages.

Through an expanded process, individuals could be sponsored by state governments to work in critical industries. This would unquestionably contribute “significant public benefit” to our nation’s labor shortages while providing non-citizens, like the thousands of asylum seekers we serve, a faster and more streamlined pathway to self-sufficiency. Here in Illinois, our 2022 WIOA Unified State Plan identified several critical industries where there are expected to be significant job openings including food processing, clean energy, health care (including in nursing and dentistry), transportation, warehousing, and more.

As the asylum seekers we serve have begun to build lives for themselves and their families in Illinois, we have witnessed the dangerous work conditions and exploitation that often result when individuals lack access to legal work and the protections that come with it. All workers in Illinois deserve to feel safe at work. The precarious legal status of non-citizen workers exposes them to a higher risk of mistreatment, especially when employers wield the power to determine the legal presence of an employee. It is our strong recommendation that in the development of this program, worker safety and worker choice is prioritized, and a worker’s legal presence is not solely tied to their employment by a single employer.

We understand that unlike standard asylum applications, various other parole programs, such as the Afghan National and Cuban, Haitian, Nicaraguan, and Venezuelan programs offer significantly

shorter pathways to work authorization and have allowed many migrants to quickly achieve self-sufficiency while contributing to critical industries that help our city and state supply chains, service industries, and care infrastructure thrive.

Our national immigration system continues to be stretched to receive and dutifully serve unprecedented numbers of individuals. We must acknowledge that in the absence of long-awaited comprehensive reform from Congress, we need to consider other significant actions that allow us to tap into the incredible value immigrants bring to our workforce and communities. DHS has the authority to expand the “Significant Public Benefit” parole designation into a process that would allow states like Illinois to opt into a lawful, orderly, efficient parole process that would address critical workforce needs. On behalf of our new residents and the municipalities and communities that are struggling to welcome them, we urge you to use this authority to everyone’s shared benefit.

Thank you for your consideration of this joint proposal. We offer our support in continuing to innovate to move towards an immigration system that better reflects the welcoming values our administrations share.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of JB Pritzker in black ink.

JB Pritzker
Governor, State of Illinois

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Brandon Johnson in black ink.

Brandon Johnson
Mayor, City of Chicago



**U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services**

January 11, 2024

The Honorable JB Pritzker
Governor of Illinois
207 State House
Springfield, IL 62706-0001

Dear Governor Pritzker:

Thank you for your August 28, 2023 letter to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) requesting significant public benefit parole (SPBP) and work authorization for noncitizens in Illinois. I am responding on behalf of the Department.

We appreciate your feedback and everything Illinois has done to welcome and support migrants, including the beneficiaries of the various parole processes. DHS worked within its existing authorities to establish safe and orderly processes for certain nationals of Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, Ukraine, and Venezuela and their immediate family members that combine an accessible and streamlined opportunity for eligible individuals to come to the United States via a lawful pathway with consequences for those who do not avail themselves of a lawful pathway. Through a fully online process, individuals can seek advance authorization to travel to the United States and be considered, on a case-by-case basis, for a temporary grant of parole for up to two years, provided they pass rigorous biometric and biographic national security and public safety screening and vetting; have a supporter in the United States who commits to providing financial and other support; and complete vaccinations and comply with other public health requirements. Individuals who are paroled through these processes can apply for an employment authorization document (EAD) with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). If granted authorization to travel to the United States, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers determine whether parole is appropriate, on a case-by-case basis for urgent humanitarian or significant public benefit reasons, at the time the noncitizen presents themselves at a port of entry (POE).

Regarding your suggestion that a process through which states may sponsor noncitizens to come to the United States to work in areas with labor shortages would be beneficial, we note individuals filing on behalf of organizations, businesses, or other entities, including state or local governments, may serve as the US-based supporters described in the above parole processes. In these instances, the organization, business, or other entity may provide some or all of the necessary support to the beneficiary. Supporters filing with or on behalf of an organization, business, or other entity should submit evidence of the entity's commitment to support the beneficiary when they file the Form I-134A, Online Request to be a Supporter and Declaration of

Financial Support. This can be demonstrated through a letter of commitment or other documentation from an officer or other credible representative of the organization, business, or other entity describing the monetary or other types of support (such as housing, basic necessities, transportation, etc.) that the entity will be providing to the beneficiary. Individuals who are filing in association with an organization, business, or other entity do not need to submit their personal financial information if the level of support demonstrated by the entity is sufficient to support the beneficiary.

Recent changes to our processing of EAD applications, including additional resources and online filing for qualifying asylum applicants and parolees, have allowed for more rapid processing of applications. On September 20, 2023, DHS announced¹ a series of actions to increase border enforcement and accelerate processing for work authorizations. Beginning October 1, USCIS began accelerated processing for EAD applications filed by parolees who scheduled an appointment through CBP One or who used the parole processes for nationals of Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, who, in contrast with asylum seekers, are authorized by law to apply for work authorization immediately.¹ Typical processing times for these categories of EADs are now approximately 30 days.

To raise awareness and inform individuals of their eligibility to seek work authorization, USCIS has sent out approximately 1.8 million emails and text messages to certain parolees in English, Spanish, Haitian Creole, Ukrainian, and Russian. USCIS also participated in outreach events nationally and locally, provided information to legal service providers and State Refugee Coordinators during calls hosted by the Office of Refugee Resettlement, and included information on EADs for parolees in national stakeholder engagements on asylum and the Family Reunification Parole Process. We have met with employees from the City of Chicago, and continue to participate in local events in Chicago, Atlanta, New York City, Houston, Dallas, and Boston. Most importantly, in December, USCIS deployed staff to a locally-organized work authorization site in Chicago and provided intake and biometric services to over 1,200 individuals seeking an EAD.

In late September, USCIS increased the maximum validity period to five years for EADs issued to certain noncitizens who are employment authorized incident to status or circumstance, including those admitted as refugees or granted asylum; recipients of withholding of removal; and applicants for asylum, adjustment of status, or cancellation of removal.² With these updates, USCIS will reduce the frequency with which noncitizens must apply to renew their work authorization, which will in turn reduce associated processing times.

Finally, since August 2023, DHS extended and redesignated Ukraine, Sudan, South Sudan, Venezuela, Afghanistan, and Cameroon for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and extended the re-registration period for TPS for El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Nepal, Nicaragua,

¹ Department of Homeland Security, Fact Sheet: The Biden-Harris Administration Takes New Actions to Increase Border Enforcement and Accelerate Processing for Work Authorizations, While Continuing to Call on Congress to Act, available at: <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2023/09/20/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-takes-new-actions-increase-border>.

² USCIS Increases Employment Authorization Document Validity Period for Certain Categories, available at: <https://www.uscis.gov/newsroom/alerts/uscis-increases-employment-authorization-document-validity-period-for-certain-categories>.

and Sudan. These TPS actions, coupled with USCIS efforts to leverage improved technology, will enable hundreds of thousands of current TPS beneficiaries to maintain employment authorization and certain newly eligible individuals to obtain employment authorization in a timely manner.

Thank you again for your letter and interest in this important issue. Please share this response with the cosigner of your letter. Should you require any additional assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ur M. Jaddou", followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Ur M. Jaddou
Director