



Support Comprehensive Immigration Reform

POSITION: Hospitality Minnesota supports comprehensive immigration reform, the Delayed Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, an expansion of the H2B and J-1 visa programs, and at the state level, providing workers the opportunity to obtain limited driving credentials.

BACKGROUND: Hospitality Minnesota is a member of the Business Immigration Coalition. Our coalition supports comprehensive federal reform that recognizes the needs of our economy, protects national security, and is humane. Successful reform will modify immigration policies without creating more obstacles for workers to connect with employers and vice versa.

New Americans have always been and continue to be a vital part of our vibrant hospitality industry at every level, from entrepreneurs to entry level workers. According to [national estimates](#), immigrants make up 22% of foodservice and 31% of overnight accommodation workers, and 37% of restaurant and 43% of small hotel owners.

For many, this industry represents the American Dream of opportunity and success through hard work and determination, with the fastest path to management and/or ownership regardless of postsecondary education. According to national restaurant experts, 9 in 10 managers and 8 in 10 owners began at entry level positions. One-in-three Americans gets their employment start in hospitality.

Hospitality needs more workers. Currently, Hospitality and Leisure remains down thousands of jobs in Minnesota from pre-pandemic levels. Even prior to the pandemic, estimates showed that the industry needed to add more than 20,000 workers in the decade. According to a December 2021 survey by the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, Explore Minnesota Tourism and Hospitality Minnesota, 87% of hospitality operators report labor availability as "tight."

[Comprehensive Immigration Reform](#). Comprehensive federal immigration reform is long overdue and federal policymakers must find a bipartisan way to reform our system in a way that meets the humanitarian and economic needs of our time while protecting national security and public safety.

[Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals \(DACA\)](#). Hospitality Minnesota has long-supported the DACA program, which provides protection from deportation to undocumented young adults who arrived in the United States as children. For the nearly 800,000 young people who've qualified for the program—sometimes referred to as "Dreamers"—it allows them to work legally and obtain health insurance and a driver's license. On July 18, 2020, the United States Supreme Court upheld the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. However, additional federal litigation is ongoing, and the federal government has moved to issue new rules this year.

Temporary Visa Programs. Hospitality Minnesota supports expansion of the H-2B and J-1 visa temporary worker programs, including a permanent increase to a statutory H-2B cap that has not been adjusted since 1992. These programs are critical to hospitality workforce in Minnesota and our industry is the primary employer of J-1 student workers in the state (in 2016 there were 1,625 participants).

Minnesota resorts, hotels and restaurants have been employing international student workers during the peak summer season for more than 25 years. There are two State Department approved programs which provide students with a J-1 visa to work lawfully in the United States. The most utilized option is the Summer Student Work Travel program, which allows up to four months of work during the peak summer season for full-time international students.

The H-2B program allows employers to hire foreign workers on a temporary basis, either seasonally, or for periods up to a year (can be extended up to three years) to meet unmet labor demand. Earlier this year, the federal government restored both of these programs, which had been blocked by the prior administration. Pursuant to requests from our industry, the current administration also temporarily raised the H-2B cap (66,000 workers annually) by 22,000. We applaud this move and urge Congress to permanently expand the statutory cap and take action to expand these critical programs as part of the solution to address workforce shortage.

Driver's License Credentials. Hospitality Minnesota—as part of the business immigration coalition—supports bipartisan state legislation to provide workers the opportunity to obtain limited driving credentials, as was allowed prior to 2003. In addition to support from the business community, civil rights advocates, and the Catholic church, this change is also supported by law enforcement officials, who see this issue as essential to public safety. Unlicensed drivers are also uninsured drivers. The State estimates that as many as 12% of drivers may be uninsured. In addition to passing safety tests, the purchase of auto insurance would be a requirement in obtaining driving credentials, which could help stabilize or lower insurance rates for all Minnesotans.

Support for immigrant driving credentials is growing and seventeen states, along with the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, have passed laws to require undocumented drivers to pass a driver's test. We urge Minnesota's legislature to take similar action and pass this bipartisan legislation.

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