

## 2019 POLICIES

# Immigration

Minnesota businesses value the contributions of immigrants to our state. Their roles as workers, entrepreneurs, consumers and a “link” to the world economy are increasingly important to the development and growth of our economy and communities throughout Minnesota. The Chamber and several other trade associations formed the Minnesota Business Immigration Coalition in 2007. This group has sponsored and/or helped oversee five studies on the current role of immigrants in the development and growth of state’s economy ([www.mnbic.org](http://www.mnbic.org).) Each shows that immigrants are a significant, positive force in our economic growth.

Demographics show that as our population ages (by 2020 the number of people 65 and older will surpass the grade-school population) and as the economy grows, Minnesota will not have the numbers of people available to fill labor needs. Immigrants are a key solution to this challenge. They are our only source of net population – and therefore worker growth – for at least the next decade.

Minnesota’s economy is first and foremost homegrown, depending on the startup and success of new businesses. Almost 40% of our state’s Fortune 500 companies were started by immigrants or their children. Nationally, the rate of immigrant entrepreneurship

exceeds that for the native-born population. While Minnesota’s immigrants lag the national rate, they are still a significant source of new enterprises.

Our current immigration system has not been overhauled since 1986. It is designed for an economy that no longer exists. As such, it frustrates businesses that need immigrants to fill jobs that native-born workers are not qualified, capable or interested in doing. Its failures have also resulted in 11 million unauthorized immigrants (about 80,000 in Minnesota) and made our borders less secure.

### **FEDERAL REFORMS**

Comprehensive federal reform of the immigration system is needed to synchronize the flow of immigrants with U.S. economic conditions. We must resolve the status of the immigrants who are now here without authorization; and, ensure uniformity in the law to avoid a patchwork of state laws. Successful federal reform will modify immigration policies without creating more obstacles for workers to connect with employers.

Federal law changes should include:

- A timely and affordable way for current immigrants and their families, authorized and unauthorized, to become documented legal participants in our society. We support a path to permanent residency for all immigrants residing in the United States who are not otherwise excluded for reasons such as criminal convictions.
- A simple and accurate status verification system that is affordable and accessible, especially for small businesses. Reforms should protect those meeting their obligations from liability.
- A workable and timely approach to the future flow of immigrants, including permanent and temporary status. New rules should allow sufficient

### **OUR KEY PRIORITIES FOR THE 2019 SESSION INCLUDE:**

- The Chamber supports comprehensive federal immigration reform.
- With federal action on immigration, address state specific laws such as driving privileges.

immigration to meet the needs of employers while continuing current workplace standards as our economy changes and grows. Current temporary immigration programs do not work for several industries important to Minnesota (e.g. agriculture, hospitality).

These will not only make the immigration system work better relative to the development and growth of Minnesota's economy, but they will also make our borders more secure. They will allow us to actually manage immigration and tune it to economic and other conditions.

### STATE LAW CHANGES

Even with federal reform, there will be need for state action relative to immigration. For example, federal legislation will not likely address immigrant eligibility for certain state programs and privileges, such as some health care programs, drivers' licenses, student loans.

We support creating a driving-only credential and make it an option for all eligible drivers. In the absence of federal reforms, this is needed for both public and workforce reasons. A significant number of Minnesota businesses rely on immigrant workers to serve their customers. In order to do so safely, all of these workers should be able to complete drivers' training and obtain a driving credential. Many states have created such credentials. The Governor and Legislature should take their best practices and create a Minnesota credential. ■