

**PRESS RELEASE**  
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**New Mexico Immigrant Organizations Coalesce  
Around Essential Worker Legislation**

**US Congressman Gabe Vasquez Introduces "The Strengthening our Workforce Act"**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, U.S. Representative Gabe Vasquez (NM-02) hosted a virtual roundtable and press conference with essential immigrant workers from New Mexico immigrants' rights organizations to announce the introduction of the *Strengthening Our Workforce Act*. Members of EL CENTRO de Igualdad y Derechos, Somos Un Pueblo Unido, Partnership for Community Action, and New Mexico CAFé, hailed the legislation for seeking to provide a swift path to legalization for undocumented workers.

Representative Vasquez's legislation aims to provide a pathway to lawful permanent residency for essential workers in key essential industries in New Mexico and across the nation, not only recognizing the vast contributions of immigrant workers, but addressing current and anticipated workforce shortages.

The bill proposes allowing immigrants without a permanent legal status in the United States who work in critical industries such as healthcare, education, construction, service, and energy production to apply for a 2-year temporary provisional status that would allow them to remain and work in the US. This newly created provisional status would mandate a minimum of 100 days of annual employment in one of the designated critical professions to maintain this status. Upon completing the two-year provisional period, those essential workers would then be eligible for immediate adjustment of status to lawful permanent residence.

One in eight workers, approximately 13% of New Mexico's labor force, is an immigrant, making up a vital part of the state's workforce across industries. In addition, New Mexico's state budget depends heavily on the labor of immigrant oil and gas workers, many of whom are undocumented workers not afforded basic workplace protections or unemployment and social security benefits.

"Undocumented immigrant workers play a crucial role in New Mexico's economy and they should be credited for their outsized contributions to this country. For years immigration reform has had fits and starts with politics getting in the way of sensible solutions. Congressman's Vasquez' *Strengthening Our Workforce Act* is a targeted and fair approach to providing better pathways for essential immigrant workers and employers. It's an important contribution to the immigration policy debate." said Marcela Díaz, Executive Director of Somos Un Pueblo Unido, a statewide immigrant and worker's rights organization.

"Immigrant oil and gas workers work hard for our families and community. We are the backbone of New Mexico's economy. We deserve protection and a temporary provisional status is just the beginning," said Jose Felix Alexis Rodriguez Flores, a long time member

of *Somos* who has lived and worked in the agricultural and oil and gas industries for 20 years in Roswell and Artesia, NM.

Between 2018 and 2028, the United States will need over 4.4 million home health caregivers to meet the needs of the nation's aging population.

"We are proud of the contributions that essential immigrant workers make to New Mexico's economy. I work every day to ensure that New Mexico's elderly and those facing illness have dignified care," said Maria de Jesus "Marichuy" Gallardo, a home healthcare aide and member of Igualdad y Derechos, an Albuquerque-based immigrants' rights and workers justice organization. "Congressman Vasquez' Strengthening Our Workforce Act will both benefit employers and workers like me in key industries who deserve workplace protections, dignified working conditions, and security for our families that allow us to continue contributing to the country we call home."

The early childcare industry also faces a national shortage of workers, experiencing a 9% decline of licensed providers in recent years.

"New Mexico's early childcare educators drive our local economy, keeping parents in the workforce and directly impacting family economic security and prosperity. An inclusive and equitable economy must include a clear pathway to citizenship for undocumented essential workers, many of whom are childcare providers, if New Mexico is to reach its full economic potential," said Teresa Madrid, a Director at Partnership for Community Action, a community based organization that supports a network of home based child care providers.

"With many uncertainties left on the table after the pandemic, our immigrant communities were affected disproportionately yet remained the strong backbone of our economy and country. We're so proud and excited to be supporting Congressman Vasquez on the Strengthening our Workforce Act." stated Ytzel Cano, Community organizer from NMCAFE.

Vasquez's own background, as a product of an immigrant family and as someone who has worked on the U.S.-Mexico border, uniquely positions him to lead these critical conversations on immigration reform in Congress.

To see a video of Congressman Vasquez' press conference in DC click here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6uKdInbkrSU>

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