



Issue Brief - Immigration Reform

Background

Attracting highly-skilled employees and entrepreneurs is critical to economic growth and competitiveness in the Great Lakes region. If these highly recruited immigrants are unable to work in the United States, other nations will benefit from their skills and acumen.

The battle for talent is global. Encouraging legal highly-skilled immigration is a vital step for growth and prosperity. Demographic changes have depleted talent pools and damaged economic competitiveness in many Great Lakes metro areas, resulting in serious workforce shortages in the region's global manufacturing and services industries. As advanced manufacturing in the Great Lakes region helps to restore the American middle class, the region's growing competitiveness will require an influx of talented, highly skilled professionals.

Great Lakes Metro Chambers Coalition's Priorities

The Great Lakes Metro Chambers Coalition urges Congress to produce immigration reform legislation. While we are sensitive to the complex issues surrounding immigration reform, we strongly urge Congress to begin fixing our nation's immigration policy by focusing first on the shortage of H-1B visas and how it affects our economy. We also encourage Congress to give extra consideration to older urban areas that have experienced significant depopulation. These areas are especially conducive to immigrant re-investment, offering proximity to world class institutions of higher learning, diverse population groups, entrepreneurial assistance programs and compelling commercial and residential real estate opportunities – all of which are attractive to highly-skilled immigrants.

Any proposal to reform immigration should include provisions to:

- Facilitate significant talent attraction, integration and retention, remove barriers, and help American companies compete;
- Include the establishment of High Skill Immigration Zones to help metro areas attract and retain deeper pools of talent;
- Increase the availability of both temporary, skilled worker (H-1B) visas and permanent resident visas (green cards) for science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) graduates and workers, as well as create new start-up visas for immigrant entrepreneurs who launch businesses in the U.S. and meet employment and financing goals.

The shortage of skilled workers is indeed real. The unemployment rate in the STEM occupations is 2.9%, while the rate for all occupations is 5.6%. Employers routinely max out the number of available H-1B visas in the first few weeks of every year. The Fiscal Year 2014 H-1B cap was reached within the first week of filings, and Fiscal Year 2015 cap was also reached in the first week, on April 7. In 2015, the number of posted jobs in four key STEM-related health care, information technology and advanced manufacturing clusters in the twelve-state Great Lakes trading region totaled 2,457,365, up 53% from 1,603,665 in 2014.

Skilled immigrants produce significant upside multipliers. The American Enterprise Institute and the Partnership for a New American Economy found that for every 100 foreign born graduates of a U.S. Master's or Ph.D. program who stay in the United States working in a STEM field, 262 jobs are created for Americans.

We strongly encourage Congress to address this pressing issue, so that the Great Lakes and the United States as a whole remain competitive in the global economy.

Contributing Chambers of Commerce

The following Chambers are contributors to the development of the Coalition's plan for growth and job creation in the Great Lakes region:

Ann Arbor/Ypsilanti Regional Chamber
Allegheny Conference
Battle Creek Area Chamber of Commerce
Buffalo Niagara Partnership
Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce
The Chamber of Commerce Grand Haven, Spring Lake, Ferrysburg
Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce
Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber
Columbus Chamber of Commerce
Dayton Area Chamber of Commerce
Detroit Regional Chamber
Duluth Area Chamber of Commerce
Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership
Fox Cities Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce
Greater Akron Chamber of Commerce
Greater Cleveland Partnership
Greater Des Moines Partnership
Greater Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce
Greater Louisville Inc. – The Metro Chamber of Commerce
Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce
Greater Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce
Kalamazoo Regional Chamber of Commerce
Lake Carriers Association
Lancaster Chamber of Commerce & Industry
Lansing Regional Chamber of Commerce
Lima/Allen County Chamber of Commerce
Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce
Michigan West Coast Chamber of Commerce
Minneapolis Regional Chamber of Commerce
Muskegon Lakeshore Chamber of Commerce
Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce
Northern Michigan Regional Chamber Alliance
Plattsburgh North Country Chamber of Commerce
Quad Cities Chamber Rockford Chamber of Commerce
Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce
Southwest Michigan First
Toledo Regional Chamber of Commerce
Traverse City Area Chamber of Commerce
West Michigan Chamber Coalition
Youngstown/Warren Regional Chamber



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