



GREAT LAKES METRO CHAMBERS COALITION

1/29/2018

The Honorable Lee Francis Cissna
Director
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
20 Massachusetts Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20529

Re: Employment Authorization for Certain H-4 Dependent Spouses

Dear Director Cissna:

On behalf of the Great Lakes Metro Chambers Coalition (GLMCC) – a coalition composed of nearly 40 chambers of commerce in the Great Lakes states that share a federal agenda, including support for immigration reform and H-1B visa expansions – we write to express our strong support for the Employment Authorization for Certain H-4 Dependent Spouses Rule (H-4 rule). As the Administration conducts its review of the H-4 rule, we respectfully encourage you and your colleagues to maintain the program.

As you are aware, the H-4 rule extends employment authorization eligibility to a limited subset of H-4 dependent spouses of H-1B nonimmigrant employees seeking employment-based lawful permanent resident (LPR) status. At a time of economic expansion and dropping unemployment (currently at 4.1% nationally), which might be further accelerated by recent tax reform legislation, the Great Lakes region is in need of skilled workers and cannot afford to have talent on the sideline.

Individuals looking to obtain H-4 authorization already legally reside in the United States and are on the path to permanent residency. They are also eager to work to support their families, contribute to their communities by paying taxes, and utilize their skills to help the U.S. economy grow. GLMCC recently partnered with the New American Economy on a first of its kind regional immigration report, *New Americans and a New Direction*¹, which clearly demonstrates the importance of immigration to the Rustbelt economic revival and reinvention in many of our cities. Several findings from the report:

- **Immigration fuels population growth in the Great Lakes region.** Immigrants accounted for half of regional population growth between 2000 and 2015 and offset population decline in nine out of the top 25 metros in the region. The Detroit and

¹ <http://research.newamericaneconomy.org/report/new-americans-and-a-new-direction-the-role-of-immigrants-in-reviving-the-great-lakes-region/>

Pittsburgh metro areas, for instance, would have shrunk by more than 200,000 and 100,000 people, respectively, if not for the arrival of immigrants.

- **Immigrants have helped revive the manufacturing industry.** Despite popular perception, manufacturing has begun a robust rebound in the Great Lakes region, adding more than 250,000 working-class jobs between 2010 and 2015, the majority of which—more than 92 percent—were filled by U.S.-born workers. This is possible, in part, because immigrants fill the higher skilled jobs that allow companies to stay local, as opposed to moving offshore. Foreign-born workers made up one out of every seven manufacturing engineers in 2015.
- **Immigrants have played a critical role powering the region’s booming healthcare sector.** Between 2000 and 2015, more than four out of every five new jobs created in the Great Lakes region—or 80.3 percent—were healthcare positions. Despite representing just 7.3 percent of the region’s population, immigrants made up 27 percent of region’s physicians and surgeons in 2015.

In the Great Lakes region, our cities are leading in the 21st century and our economies are expanding. As these expansions continue, we expect our labor markets to continue to tighten and for worker shortages to grow. Leaders in all of our cities are working to enhance workforce development efforts to retrain incumbent workers and attract new talent – skilled immigrants that can fill essential roles in our workforce is a critical part of the solution. The H-4 rule is instrumental in allowing Great Lakes employers to attract needed talent.

At a time of economic expansion, it would be a major error to constrict the ability to attract skilled talent. Furthermore, many of the eligible spouses are already building relationships in their communities, paying taxes, and contributing to our country. For these reasons, we respectfully ask for support and expansion of the Employment Authorization for Certain H-4 Dependent Spouses Rule (H-4 rule).

Respectfully,

Brandon Mendoza
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Co-Director
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