



# The Clear Pathway to Citizenship

A Rules-Based Immigration Framework for the United States of America

Miguel has worked construction in the United States for a decade. He has paid his taxes every year with an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number. He has never been arrested. He speaks English fluently. His children were born here. But Miguel lives in fear. His employer knows his immigration status, threatens him with ICE when he complains about unpaid overtime, and pays him \$12 an hour for work that pays citizens \$25. Miguel cannot report violations, cannot organize, and cannot demand fair treatment. He is not an outlier. He is one of approximately 11 million people living in the same shadow.

The current immigration system is broken for everyone. It is broken for immigrants who want to earn citizenship but face a labyrinth of bureaucratic categories, decades-long backlogs, and arbitrary enforcement. It is broken for American workers whose wages are undercut because employers can hire undocumented workers for half price with no consequences. It is broken for anyone who believes in the rule of law but sees a system that makes legal immigration nearly impossible while creating every incentive for illegal immigration.

The Clear Pathway to Citizenship replaces this broken system with a framework built on clear rules, defined timelines, and structural accountability. It establishes three stages from arrival to citizenship: visa status, legal residency, and naturalization. The total timeline is five and a half years. Six visa categories replace the current maze of dozens. Work visas are not tied to a single employer, so workers can change jobs freely without losing their status. Criminal disqualifications are strict, uniform, and permanent for violent offenses. Due process protections guarantee the right to counsel, limit detention, protect family unity, and remove immigration courts from executive branch control.

The framework also addresses the 11 million undocumented residents already living and working in the United States through a one-time registration opportunity. Any undocumented resident with at least one year of physical presence, a record of employment, education, or family care, and no violent felony convictions can register for immediate legal resident status for a \$500 fee. Those with less than one year of presence apply for a visa and begin the standard pathway. DACA recipients, brought to this country as children through no choice of their own, receive immediate legal resident status with no penalty fee. Refugees accepted through formal programs receive the same. And it protects every worker in America by extending full federal labor law protections to all workers regardless of immigration status, with severe penalties for employers who use immigration threats as a weapon against workers asserting their rights. This is not amnesty. It is a system. A system with rules, timelines, consequences, and a pathway that rewards compliance while punishing exploitation.



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# Discarding the Broken System

## I. The Problem: A System Designed to Fail

The United States immigration system is not merely dysfunctional. It is structurally designed to produce the outcomes it produces. Backlogs measured in decades. Over 80 visa categories that even immigration attorneys struggle to navigate. Employer-tied work visas that give bosses the power to deport workers who complain. A court system controlled by the executive branch, where the same administration that sets enforcement priorities also controls the judges deciding individual cases. And a permanent population of 11 million undocumented residents with no realistic pathway to legal status, creating a permanent underclass that suppresses wages, invites exploitation, and makes a mockery of the rule of law. This system serves specific interests. Employers benefit from a workforce that cannot complain, cannot organize, and cannot demand fair pay. Politicians benefit from an issue that generates perpetual outrage without requiring solutions. And the bureaucratic complexity itself serves as a barrier, ensuring that legal immigration remains inaccessible to most people while the demand for labor guarantees that illegal immigration continues. The consequences extend far beyond immigrants themselves. When employers can hire undocumented workers for half the prevailing wage with no labor protections, every American worker loses negotiating power. When 11 million people cannot participate in the legal economy, cannot report crimes, and cannot access basic services, entire communities become less safe and less prosperous. When the immigration court system operates under executive control, due process becomes a political tool rather than a legal guarantee. The current system is not broken. It is working exactly as designed. The Clear Pathway to Citizenship redesigns it from the ground up.

## II. The Three-Stage Pathway to Citizenship

The Clear Pathway replaces the current maze of visa categories, arbitrary timelines, and bureaucratic dead ends with a single, transparent framework. Three stages. Defined timelines. Clear requirements at each step. A total maximum of five and a half years from initial visa to citizenship.



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# Three Clear Stages

## Stage One: Visa Status

Six visa categories replace the current system of over 80: work, education, tourism, visitor, diplomacy, and asylum. Each category serves a defined purpose. The categories are simple enough that any applicant can identify which one applies to them without hiring an attorney. Visas are renewable every six months. Each renewal requires a background check and a fee of \$200. Applications must be processed within 60 days. If the government fails to process an application within that window, the visa is automatically renewed pending review. Work visas are not employer-specific. This is one of the most important changes in the entire framework. Under the current system, employer-tied visas give bosses the power to control workers through the threat of deportation. If you complain about unsafe conditions, unpaid wages, or harassment, your employer can revoke your visa sponsorship and send you home. The Clear Pathway eliminates this leverage entirely. A work visa authorizes you to work in the United States. Period. You can change employers freely, negotiate wages, report violations, and organize without risking your legal status. The minimum duration at the visa stage is two successful renewals, or 12 months. This ensures that visa holders establish a track record of compliance, employment, education, or other qualifying activity before advancing to legal residency.

## Stage Two: Legal Resident Status

After two successful visa renewals, individuals advance to legal residency. Legal resident status is renewable every 18 months. Three qualifying purposes exist: work, study, or family care. Caregiving counts as a valid qualifying purpose without separate employment required, recognizing that many residents contribute to their communities and families through unpaid care work that the current system ignores entirely. Legal residents can work anywhere, travel freely, buy property, access a driver's license, and receive full labor law protections. They cannot be threatened with deportation by employers. Renewals cost \$500 and must be processed within 90 days. The minimum duration at the legal residency stage is three renewals, totaling 54 months or four and a half years. This is the longest stage of the pathway, and intentionally so. Legal residency is where individuals demonstrate sustained commitment to living, working, and contributing in the United States.



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# Three Clear Stages

## Stage Three: Citizenship

After two successful legal residency renewals, individuals can apply for citizenship simultaneously with their third renewal. During the 18-month processing period, applicants complete a comprehensive background check, a civics examination that can be administered in the applicant's native language, and a basic English proficiency test. Persons age 65 and older or persons with disabilities are exempt from the English requirement. The citizenship fee is \$1,000.

The requirements for naturalized citizenship are defined and non-negotiable:

**\*\*Lawful visa status\*\*** maintained for a minimum of one year.

**\*\*Legal resident status\*\*** maintained for four and a half years while employed, enrolled in education, or caring for family members.

**\*\*Basic English, Spanish or French proficiency\*\*** demonstrated through examination, with exemptions for persons age 65 and older or persons with disabilities.

**\*\*Civics examination\*\*** passed, administered in the applicant's native language if needed.

**\*\*Tax compliance\*\*** maintained throughout the pathway.

**\*\*No conviction for violent felonies.\*\*** This standard is absolute.

**\*\*Naturalized Citizenship Equality\*\*** Naturalized citizens hold all rights, privileges, and protections equal to birthright citizens. Citizenship, once granted, cannot be revoked except in cases of fraud in the application process. Naturalized citizens may maintain dual citizenship with their country of origin. No distinction is made in law between birthright and naturalized citizens, with one exception: only birthright citizens may serve as President or Vice President.

**\*\*Birthright Citizenship\*\*** All persons born in the United States are citizens of the United States. This right cannot be restricted or conditioned based on the immigration status of parents. Birthright citizenship cannot be revoked by government action. This is not a new principle. It is a reaffirmation of one that must be made unassailable.

## III. Criminal Disqualification: Strict, Uniform, Permanent

The pathway to citizenship is earned. It requires sustained compliance with the law over five and a half years. Criminal disqualifications are designed to be clear, consistent, and unforgiving for violent offenses. Any violent crime permanently disqualifies a person from obtaining citizenship. No waivers. No exceptions. This includes murder, rape, assault, robbery, kidnapping, domestic violence, any crime involving a weapon, drug trafficking, fraud, terrorism, and human trafficking. Non-violent offenses committed with a weapon in the person's possession are treated as violent crimes. This standard applies to all persons nationwide regardless of citizenship status. It is not a standard that targets immigrants. It is a standard that applies universally. Non-violent offenses without weapons, such as drug possession, minor property crimes, and traffic violations, are not automatically disqualifying. They are reviewed on a case-by-case basis. The distinction matters. A person who made a mistake should not be permanently barred from citizenship for a non-violent offense. A person who committed violence has demonstrated a willingness to harm others that the pathway does not accommodate.



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# One-Time Registration

## IV. One-Time Registration for Undocumented Residents

Approximately 11 million people are living in the United States without lawful status. Some have been here for decades. Many have U.S.-citizen children, pay taxes, own homes, and are embedded in their communities. The current system offers them nothing: no pathway, no resolution, and no incentive to come forward. The Clear Pathway addresses this through a one-time registration opportunity. **\*\*Eligibility and Timeline\*\*** The registration window opens for 18 months following enactment. After 18 months, the window closes permanently. It cannot be extended or repeated. This is a one-time opportunity, and the deadline is real. Applicants must demonstrate physical presence in the United States for at least one year prior to enactment, employment or enrollment in education or care for family members, and no conviction for violent felonies. A background check is required.

### Registration Categories

One year or more of physical presence:

Register during the 18-month window, demonstrate employment, education, or family care, pass a background check, and pay a registration fee of \$500. Upon registration, the applicant receives immediate legal resident status. The citizenship clock starts fresh from the date of registration. Prior undocumented time does not count toward the four-and-a-half-year residency requirement.

Less than one year of physical presence:

Does not qualify for one-time registration. The applicant applies for a visa through the standard pathway and begins at Stage One. They are not forced to leave the country. They enter the system where they are and proceed through the full three-stage process.

The registration framework is simple by design. One threshold: one year of presence. One fee: \$500. One outcome: legal resident status with a clear pathway to citizenship. There are no tiers, no escalating fees, and no requirement to leave the country. The system meets people where they are.

Prior undocumented time does not count toward the citizenship requirement. The clock starts fresh upon registration. This means a person who has been in the United States for 20 years still completes the full four-and-a-half-year legal residency period before becoming eligible for citizenship. Time in the shadows does not substitute for time in the system. But neither does the system punish presence. If you have been here for a year, you qualify. Register, pay the fee, and begin.

DACA Recipients

Approximately 800,000 people were brought to the United States as children through no choice of their own. They grew up here. They went to school here. Many know no other country. DACA recipients skip the visa stage entirely, receive immediate legal resident status upon registration, and pay no penalty fee. Their pathway to citizenship is four and a half years from registration. This is not a reward. It is a recognition that punishing people for decisions made by their parents when they were children is not justice.



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# Due Process and Humane Treatment

## V. Due Process and Humane Treatment

The immigration system's treatment of people in its custody and under its jurisdiction reflects the nation's values more clearly than any speech about freedom. The Clear Pathway establishes due process protections that apply to every person in immigration proceedings, without exception.

**Refugees:** Refugees accepted through formal international programs receive immediate legal resident status. Their total pathway to citizenship is four and a half years. These are people who have already been vetted through international refugee processes and who came to the United States through lawful channels established for exactly this purpose.

**Family Unity:** No person may be deported or removed from the United States if doing so would separate them from United States citizen children, spouses, or parents. The sole exception is conviction for violent felonies. When a parent is subject to deportation, the best interests of citizen or lawful permanent resident children are a primary consideration. No children may be separated from parents or legal guardians at the border or during immigration enforcement except when necessary to protect the child from abuse or neglect.

**Right to Counsel:** All persons in immigration proceedings have the right to legal counsel at all stages. For persons who cannot afford counsel, the government provides counsel at no cost. This right applies to adults and children, including unaccompanied minors. No person faces deportation without legal representation.

**Detention Limitations:** No person may be detained for immigration violations for longer than 90 days unless charged with a crime. Immigration detention is not punishment and may not be punitive in nature. Conditions of detention must meet the same constitutional standards as all other detention facilities, including access to healthcare, sanitation, adequate food, bedding, and space. Families may not be detained except as a last resort and for the shortest time possible.

**Independent Immigration Court:** All immigration cases are heard by an Independent Immigration Court system, separate from the executive branch. This is a structural change of enormous significance. Under the current system, immigration judges are employees of the Department of Justice, which is controlled by the attorney general, who is appointed by the president. The same administration that sets enforcement priorities controls the judges deciding individual cases. This is not due process. It is political control dressed in judicial clothing. The Independent Immigration Court removes this conflict. Judges serve 10-year terms and can be removed only for cause. The court has jurisdiction over asylum applications, deportation proceedings, and appeals of visa and residency denials. Proceedings include the right to counsel, evidentiary hearings, and appeal to a three-judge panel. Final appeals may be taken to federal district courts.



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# Universal Worker Protections

## VI. Universal Worker Protections

The exploitation of immigrant workers is not a side effect of the broken immigration system. It is the system's primary economic function. When employers can hire undocumented workers for half the prevailing wage, threaten them with deportation if they complain, and face no meaningful consequences, every worker in America loses. The undocumented worker loses because they are exploited. The documented worker loses because their wages are undercut. The citizen loses because the entire labor market is distorted by a permanent underclass with no legal protections. The Clear Pathway eliminates this dynamic by extending full federal labor law protections to every worker performing labor in the United States, regardless of citizenship or immigration status.

**Universal Coverage:** Every worker is covered by the Fair Labor Standards Act, including minimum wage and overtime. Every worker is covered by the Occupational Safety and Health Act. Every worker is covered by the National Labor Relations Act, including the right to organize and bargain collectively. Every worker is covered by Title VII protections against discrimination. Every worker is covered by all state labor laws. Immigration status is not a defense in labor proceedings. Use of false documents does not bar recovery of wages owed.

**Prohibited Employer Actions:** Employers are prohibited from reporting or threatening to report immigration status, contacting immigration authorities regarding workers who file labor complaints, using immigration status for adverse employment action, or requiring immigration disclosure as a condition of asserting labor rights. Any immigration-related adverse action within one year of a worker asserting labor rights creates a rebuttable presumption of retaliation.

**Penalties Violations:** carry penalties of \$25,000 per worker per violation, plus back pay, compensatory damages, and punitive damages up to \$100,000. Willful violations carry criminal penalties of up to two years. These are not symbolic penalties. They are designed to make the exploitation of immigrant workers more expensive than paying fair wages.

**Automatic Deferred Action:** Workers who file complaints with the Department of Labor, the EEOC, the NLRB, or OSHA receive automatic deferred action for the duration of the investigation, the duration of proceedings, and one year following final resolution. The labor agency provides protected status documentation within 14 days of the complaint. Workers receive work authorization during the protected period. This deferred action is binding on ICE, CBP, and USCIS. No immigration agency can override a labor protection.

**Pathway to Legal Status for Enforcement Cooperation:** Workers who report violations involving criminal conduct, such as wage theft, trafficking, or unsafe conditions, and cooperate with the investigation are eligible for U-visa status. Workers whose reports result in significant enforcement, meaning penalties exceeding \$100,000 or criminal prosecution, are eligible for lawful permanent residence and a reduced citizenship pathway of three years. Spouses and minor children are included in all immigration relief. This creates a structural incentive for workers to come forward, which in turn creates a structural deterrent for employers who exploit them.



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# Administration and Funding

## VII. Administration and Funding

States administer visa and residency applications under federal guidelines with federal funding support. This distributes the processing workload across existing state infrastructure while maintaining national standards. The federal government provides \$2 billion in annual base funding.

Fees collected from applicants, approximately \$1 billion annually, supplement federal funding.

The total system cost is roughly \$3 billion annually.

The Independent Immigration Court requires an additional \$500 million in annual funding to ensure adequate staffing, facilities, and processing capacity.

An Office of Immigrant Worker Protection is established within the Department of Labor with \$50 million in annual funding to receive and investigate complaints, issue deferred action documentation, coordinate with immigration agencies, and conduct outreach to immigrant communities.

The total annual investment is approximately \$3.55 billion.

For context, the current immigration enforcement apparatus costs far more while producing a system that everyone, immigrants and citizens alike, agrees is broken.

**Current Budget**  
**~31 Billion**  
**per year**

**Our Budget**  
**~5 Billion**  
**per year**



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# Rules Not Rhetoric

## VIII. Rules, Not Rhetoric

The immigration debate in America has been defined by two positions, both of them failures. One side demands open borders or near-open borders, ignoring the legitimate need for a managed system with clear rules and enforceable standards. The other side demands walls, raids, and mass deportation, ignoring the economic reality that America depends on immigrant labor and the moral reality that 11 million people cannot simply be wished away. The Clear Pathway to Citizenship rejects both positions. It is a system. It has rules. Those rules are clear enough that any person can understand them, strict enough that they carry real consequences, and fair enough that they reward people who follow them. You want to come to America? Here is the pathway. Six visa categories. Twelve months at the visa stage. Four and a half years of legal residency. Civics exam. English proficiency. Tax compliance. No violent felonies. Five and a half years, and you are a citizen with every right and protection that citizenship carries. You are already here without documentation? Here is your one chance. Register within 18 months. Pay the \$500 fee. Pass the background check. Enter the system. The clock starts fresh, and the pathway is the same. You are an employer who exploits immigrant workers? Here are the penalties. \$25,000 per worker per violation. Criminal prosecution for willful offenses. And every worker you threaten gets automatic protection from deportation while the investigation proceeds. This framework does not solve every problem. It does not address the root causes that drive migration, the economic conditions in sending countries, the foreign policy failures that destabilize regions, or the climate pressures that will displace millions in the coming decades. Those are separate challenges requiring separate solutions. What this framework does is replace a broken system with one that works. Clear rules. Defined timelines. Structural protections for workers. Due process for everyone. An independent court system free from political control. And a pathway to citizenship that is demanding enough to be credible and accessible enough to be real. America has always been a nation of immigrants. It is time for an immigration system that reflects that fact instead of denying it.



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# Join the Movement

Demand the Change that You Deserve

## A Constitution That Protects All Four Roles

The American Constitution was written to protect citizens from government overreach. But even the protections it does promise, including the right to vote, are under active assault through gerrymandering, voter suppression, and the influence of unlimited money in elections. And the Constitution offers no protection at all from corporate overreach. There is no constitutional guarantee that your power as a consumer, a worker, or an owner will be defended at all, let alone with the force that a functioning democracy requires. The Four Pillars framework starts from a simple premise: a constitution for the 21st century must protect citizens in all four of the roles they actually play. Not just as voters whose rights exist on paper, but as consumers who deserve fair markets, workers who deserve fair compensation, and the opportunity for everyone to become owners to generate wealth. Every reform proposed by Quest Coalition is built on this framework. The Constitution of the New Founding establishes structural protections for all four pillars. The New Founding Act implements those protections with specific mechanisms, from tax brackets to enforcement agencies to transition timelines. The Visual Guide demonstrates that every reform is fully funded. The Clear Pathway to Citizenship extends these protections to every person who lives and works in the United States. And the Partnership Standards Framework applies the same principle internationally: democratic governance, the protection of citizens in all their roles, and respect for the sovereignty of other nations are the gateway to economic partnership with the United States. Six documents. One framework. The Four Pillars of American Citizenship.

## The Four Pillars of Citizenship

The framework. How Votership, Consumership, Workership, and Ownership shape your life.

## The Constitution of the New Founding

The supreme law. Rights, structures, and principles for a government that serves the people.

## The New Founding Act

Implementing legislation. Tax brackets, timelines, enforcement, and every detail to make it real.

## The Visual Guide

A brief overview of what changes, who benefits, why the math works.

## Pathway to Citizenship

Immigration reform. Clear rules, defined timelines, structural accountability.

## The Partnership Standards Framework

Foreign policy with independent enforcement. Democracy and sovereignty as the gateway to trade.

Read everything at [questcoalition.com](https://questcoalition.com)



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# Join the Movement

What To Do Now!

- 1. Share.** Send these documents to friends, family, and your representatives. The ideas speak for themselves when people see the numbers.
- 2. Read, Engage, Discuss.** Read the Constitution. Understand the frameworks so you can explain it to others.
- 3. Join Single-Day Peaceful Protests.** Show up. Be counted. Peaceful mass demonstration is one of the most powerful tools citizens have.
- 4. Plan Single-Day General Strikes.** When millions of workers stop for one day, the economy notices. Make the cost of inaction visible.
- 5. Boycott Companies That Support Fascism.** Your consumer power is real. Stop funding the forces that work against your interests.
- 6. Sustain the Pressure.** Plan for a sustained weeks-long protest and strike. The Civil Rights Act took a decade. Transformation requires persistence.
- 7. Demand These Reforms.** When the pressure is applied, it is important to vocalize what we want. A stronger democracy and a just economy. These frameworks can achieve that.

**We created these documents to start a discussion about building “A More Perfect Union” that we believe is within reach.**

**Did we get everything right? Probably not. And that’s okay.**

**The most important part for us was to share a vision that will start a conversation and lead to all of us, We The People, to collectively build the future we want.**

**Every System is Designed. Which means we can redesign it, build it better, and make changes now.**



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