



VETERANS *for* **NEW AMERICANS**



FOR LOVE OF COUNTRY:

NEW AMERICANS SERVING IN OUR ARMED FORCES



**NATIONAL
IMMIGRATION
FORUM**





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FOR LOVE OF COUNTRY:

NEW AMERICANS SERVING IN OUR ARMED FORCES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For generations, immigrants have served proudly in the U.S. armed forces. Understanding the history of military service by immigrants, as well as the legal barriers to the enlistment of skilled foreign-born residents, leads us to clear policy recommendations for President Trump and Congress to consider.

Today, approximately 40,000 immigrants serve in the armed forces, and approximately 5,000 noncitizens enlist each year. As of 2016, about 511,000 veterans were foreign-born. Throughout U.S. history, many immigrants have served with distinction and are among those who have received the highest military honors. More than 20 percent of Medal of Honor recipients are immigrants.

Going forward, the net growth in the U.S. population of 18- to 29-year-olds — the segment of the population most likely to enlist — will come entirely from immigrants and the children of immigrants. With the economy having recovered from the recession of the late 2000s, for the military to recruit young people successfully, each military branch must have access to the largest potential pool of qualified candidates. The Center for Naval Analyses estimated in 2015 that only 13 percent of 17- to 24-year-olds in the U.S. are qualified and available to serve in the military.

Therefore, immigrants will play an increasingly vital role in the military's ability to sustain an all-volunteer force. Immigrants will be an important segment of available military recruits — not just because of their numbers, but also because they possess critical skills in demand by the military. Immigrants also have lower attrition rates than other recruits.

A population of willing soldiers remains blocked from military service. Tens of thousands of young undocumented immigrants, brought to the U.S. as children and who have grown up in this country, likely would serve in the military if they were legally able to do so. If Congress were to pass legislation to legalize the status of these young people, the military would benefit from the addition of thousands of high-quality recruits. A 2010 estimate put the number of potential enlistees upon passage of legislation pending at the time — the DREAM Act — at more than 70,000. It is clear why military leaders at the highest levels, such as Gen. Colin Powell, have urged Congress to pass such legislation.

America's broken immigration system impacts active-duty military who have family members at risk of or under deportation orders. Many service members are afraid to deploy because they fear what might happen to their immigrant family members. This oversight may affect thousands of service members directly. Moreover, if veterans have family members who are undocumented, they risk losing their critical support system as they attempt to reintegrate. A veteran's family is the key to a successful transition into civilian life; the stress of potential deportation undermines this process.

And in some instances, veterans who did not naturalize during or after enlistment have been deported. The U.S. armed forces should ensure that immigrant service members have the support they need to apply for citizenship.

Margaret Stock, a retired lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army Reserve and former professor at West Point Military Academy, put it best when she warned that the government has created an “extremely complex and often arbitrary system of immigration laws and regulations without full attention to the detrimental impact that this system has on the readiness of the U.S. armed forces.”

Veterans for New Americans calls on Congress and the White House to modernize our immigration process and pass immigration reforms that take into account national security and military readiness needs. It is in our nation’s best interest to ensure that service members focus on their mission and have family support while they are deployed and when they return home from overseas assignments. Our nation can ensure the broadest pool of potential service members by including the millions of young undocumented people who came to the U.S. as children. Moreover, all branches of the armed services should do all they can to ensure that noncitizen soldiers understand their opportunities for citizenship and help them secure the rights they have earned by defending our nation.





INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of our republic, for love of country, immigrants proudly have defended our nation on the front lines of conflicts around the globe. And they continue to do so. While the rules pertaining to immigration status have changed over the years — today, immigrants generally must be lawful permanent residents in order to serve — immigrants continue to defend our nation well before they become citizens.

The U.S. armed forces face recruitment challenges, and our immigration laws bar undocumented youth who were brought to the U.S. as children and who have grown up in the U.S. from service. Moreover, thousands of active-duty personnel have immigrant family members who do not have legal status for one reason or another. For these family members, deportation is always a threat. Some of our military service members worry not only about surviving their deployment, but also about the prospect of their spouse or other family member being deported during deployment or after they return home. In some cases, veterans who did not naturalize during enlistment or after enlistment have been deported.

Just as with past generations, Americans are and will be defended by immigrants. It is more important than ever to understand the history of immigrants' military service, the legal barriers to the enlistment of skilled foreign-born residents, and what immigration policy changes are necessary to keep our nation secure.

PART 1

IMMIGRANTS HAVE DEFENDED AMERICA THROUGHOUT OUR HISTORY

A high percentage of recruits in our country's earliest military conflicts were immigrants. Irish immigrants boosted military ranks in the War of 1812.¹ In the 1840s, half of Army recruits were immigrants.² Roughly one in four members of the Union Army during the Civil War were immigrants, some of whom came from abroad to fight.³

At the turn of the 20th century, immigrants who could speak English and who declared their intent to become citizens enlisted in significant numbers, making up 12 to 15 percent of the Army.⁴ During World War I, the government drafted nearly a half-million immigrants, creating a force that was 18 percent immigrant.⁵ The Army set up special camps to teach English to the Polish, Italian, Hungarian and other troops, and 150,000 of these troops became citizens through their wartime service.⁶

It is remarkable that so many immigrants demonstrated their patriotism for their adopted country by putting their lives on the line to defend our nation even before they had become citizens. During World War II, Congress recognized immigrants' honorable service and changed the laws to make it much easier for immigrants serving in the military to become naturalized citizens.⁷ One such change, in 1942, authorized immigration officials to naturalize members of the armed forces while they served overseas. By the end of the war, the government had conducted more than 13,000 overseas naturalizations.⁸

It wasn't until 1961 that Congress added a requirement that noncitizens must be lawful permanent residents to enlist in the military in times of peace.⁹ Today, although undocumented immigrants generally cannot serve in the military,¹⁰ the U.S. Selective Service does require all 18- to 26-year-olds, regardless of legal status, to register. They are subject to the draft if one is necessary during a national emergency.

Immigrants continue to play a vital role in our nation's military and reserves. Our Armed Forces continue to benefit from the patriotism, hard work and skills that immigrants bring — skills such as foreign-language proficiency and cultural competencies that support our strategic interests when troops are deployed abroad.

In 2015, about 40,000 immigrants served in the armed forces.¹¹ Today, about 5,000 noncitizen permanent residents enlist each year.¹² In 2016, approximately 511,000 U.S. veterans, or about 3 percent, were foreign-born.¹³ Further, about 11 percent of U.S. veterans came from an immigrant background; they either were foreign-born or had an immigrant parent.¹⁴

Many immigrants have served with distinction and are among those who have received the highest honors in the armed forces. More than 700 — or more than 20 percent — of the 3,500 Medal of Honor recipients are immigrants.¹⁵ Immigrants and children of immigrants have risen to the highest ranks in the military, including Polish-born Gen. John Shalikashvili, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and supreme allied commander, as well as Gen. Colin Powell, son of Jamaican immigrants, who served as national security adviser, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and secretary of state.

For years, military service has been a tool for integrating American society, where all individuals serving are counted on equally to defend their brothers and sisters on the front line. Service members depend on the people to the left, right, front and back of them, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or immigration status. Military service offers equal opportunities for promotion, future education and skills training.

Like other immigrants, many who serve in the armed forces desire to become citizens. Immigrants in the military are currently offered an expedited naturalization process. In July 2002, President George W. Bush signed an executive order authorizing citizenship through an expedited naturalization process for noncitizens who served honorably in the armed forces on or after Sept. 11, 2001.¹⁶ Between Oct. 1, 2001, and Sept. 30, 2015, more than 109,000 service members naturalized.¹⁷ In contrast, in the 10 years preceding the executive order, there were only about 27,500 military naturalizations.¹⁸ The same executive order activated a provision in immigration law allowing citizenship to be granted posthumously to immigrants who die while on active duty in times of combat. Between 2001 and 2016, approximately 100 immigrants were awarded citizenship posthumously.¹⁹

On October 13, 2017, the Department of Defense made changes in the process for lawful permanent resident service members seeking to expedite naturalization due to their military service. Lawful permanent resident enlistees must have a completed military security suitability determination background check *before* initial training can begin. Due to backlogs in the security screening, these enlistees may face a one-year wait before they can begin basic training.²⁰ In addition, lawful permanent resident enlistees must serve a minimum of 180 days of active duty service or complete one year of reserve service before being eligible for expedited naturalization.²¹

Service members depend on the people to the left, right, front and back of them, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or immigration status.



Immigrants are 20% of Medal of Honor recipients.

PROFILES

SYLVESTRE HERRERA:

MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENT FOR SERVICE IN WORLD WAR II

After Sylvestre Herrera received his draft notice in 1944, he was shocked to find out that he had been born in Mexico and was not required to join the service. But Herrera loved his country and didn't want anyone to die in his place. Herrera joined the Texas National Guard and was sent to Europe. While fighting in France, Pfc. Herrera also studied to become a U.S. citizen. On March 15, 1945, Herrera advanced with his platoon along a wooded road until stopped by heavy enemy machine-gun fire. As the rest of the unit took cover, Pfc. Herrera made a one-man frontal assault and captured eight enemy soldiers. When the platoon resumed its advance and came under more fire, Pfc. Herrera moved forward, disregarding the danger of exploding mines, to attack. He stepped on a mine and had both feet severed. Despite intense pain and unchecked loss of blood, he continued with accurate rifle fire and pinned down the enemy. Pfc. Herrera's incredible heroism and courage earned him the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest military award.²²

FLORENT GROBERG:

MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENT FOR SERVICE IN AFGHANISTAN

Florent "Flo" Groberg was born in France and moved to the United States as a boy. He became a citizen in 2001, the same year he graduated from high school in Bethesda, Maryland. After graduating from the University of Maryland with a degree in criminology and criminal justice, Groberg joined the Army in 2008. During his second deployment to Afghanistan, in 2012, Groberg and another soldier confronted a suicide bomber, pushing the bomber away from his company of 28 soldiers on patrol. The bomber detonated his vest, causing a second, hidden bomber to detonate his own vest prematurely. Groberg's actions saved the majority of his company, but the serious injuries he sustained to his leg, eardrum and head required 33 operations over three years, after which he was medically retired from the Army. He went on to become a civilian employee of the Pentagon. In addition to numerous awards for his service, including the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star, Groberg was awarded the Medal of Honor by President Barack Obama in 2015.²³



PART 2

THE ARMED FORCES NEED A BROADER POOL OF ELIGIBLE RECRUITS

Even with the reduced size of the armed forces following the military withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan, the armed forces face a recruitment challenge in the years ahead. For 2017, the Army has a target of 476,000 active-duty soldiers, the Air Force a target of 321,000 service members, the Navy a target of 323,900 sailors and the Marines a target of 185,000.²⁴ Because economic opportunity is greater in civilian markets, the job of the military recruiter is more difficult. As the economy has rallied since the recession, the unemployment rate among 16- to 24-year-olds has fallen to prerecession levels.

The military recruiter's job is difficult also because more and more high school graduates are enrolling in college immediately. In 2014, 68 percent of high school graduates immediately went to college, up from 60 percent in 1990.²⁵ Others in the recruiting age range are not qualified for service because of drug use, poor conduct, too many dependents, poor physical fitness and low aptitude. Subtracting those who are not available or unqualified (without a waiver) leaves only an estimated 13 percent of 17- to 24-year-olds eligible to serve.²⁶ Out of a total target recruitment population of 33.4 million, the Army estimates that just 136,000 young people (0.4 percent) would be willing and qualified to serve.²⁷



A February 2017 report estimated the Army would spend \$300 million in bonuses and advertising to recruit 6,000 additional soldiers to meet its target of 68,500 recruits through the end of the fiscal year.²⁸

Much of the growth in the pool of potential armed forces recruits will come from immigrant enlistment and commissions. Immigration is projected to be the only future source of net growth in the U.S. population among 18- to 29-year-olds, the desired age range for recruits.²⁹

Many leaders recognize that immigrants compose a vital and valuable pool of potential military recruits. The Center for Naval Analyses catalogued this data in a 2011 report. It listed three reasons immigrants are important for the military. First, the number of recruitable noncitizens in the U.S. in the desired age range is quite large, at approximately 1.2 million; second, immigrants possess skills critically needed in the armed forces, including language diversity and cultural competencies that support strategic interests; and third, noncitizen recruits have far lower attrition rates and are much less likely to leave early in their service, saving critical time and money.³⁰

From 2009 to 2016, the military made a special effort to recruit immigrants with special skills. For example, the Army has a special position for interpreters and translators who know languages of strategic interest.³¹ The Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest (MAVNI) recruitment program was open to noncitizens (including certain undocumented immigrants) who possessed critical skills — specifically medical specialists and speakers of certain languages. Since MAVNI began in 2009, more than 10,400 troops have provided the military with these critical skills.³² But the program's future is uncertain. In June 2017, reports emerged that the Pentagon could halt the program and cancel enlistment contracts for 1,800 recruits. About 1,000 of those recruits may be out of status and could be deported if the Pentagon cancels their contracts.³³ Hundreds of contracts were cancelled in September 2017.³⁴ According to the Pentagon, the contracts were cancelled because the law requires the discharge of recruits who have not shipped to initial military training within two years (in this case the contracts were cancelled because the security screenings had not been completed within that time).³⁵ An amendment was included in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018 to authorize the secretary of defense to extend the enlistment period for up to an additional year if necessary to complete security reviews of enlistees.³⁶

Undocumented young people who were brought to the U.S. as children remain unavailable to military recruiters. This population would have received lawful permanent resident status through various legislative proposals that Congress has considered over the past 15 years — but all of the proposals have failed. A 2010 report estimated that more than 70,000 undocumented young people might successfully pursue permanent legal status through enlistment in the military under a legislative proposal under consideration at that time.³⁷

THREE REASONS IMMIGRANTS ARE IMPORTANT FOR THE MILITARY:

- ☆ THE NUMBER OF RECRUITABLE NONCITIZENS IN THE U.S. IN THE DESIRED AGE RANGE IS QUITE LARGE, AT APPROXIMATELY 1.2 MILLION.
- ☆ IMMIGRANTS POSSESS SKILLS CRITICALLY NEEDED IN THE ARMED FORCES, INCLUDING LANGUAGE DIVERSITY AND CULTURAL COMPETENCIES THAT SUPPORT STRATEGIC INTERESTS.
- ☆ NONCITIZEN RECRUITS HAVE FAR LOWER ATTRITION RATES AND ARE MUCH LESS LIKELY TO LEAVE EARLY IN THEIR SERVICE, SAVING CRITICAL TIME AND MONEY.

CENTER FOR NAVAL ANALYSES

The DREAM Act of 2010 would have allowed certain undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. as children to earn legalization. When Congress was considering the bill, many high-ranking military officials spoke in favor of it. These leaders included Gen. Colin Powell, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and secretary of state; Robert Gates, former secretary of defense; David S. C. Chu, former undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness; and Bill Carr, former acting deputy undersecretary of defense for military personnel policy.³⁸ Louis Caldera, former secretary of the Army, remarked that for many of the potential recruits who would be eligible for the DREAM Act, “military service is a highly appealing way to better themselves, give back to their country and earn their residency and eventually citizenship. I have no doubt many of these enlistees will be among the best soldiers in our Army.”³⁹

Had the DREAM Act become law, the potential recruits available to the military would have been, on average, more likely to be eligible to serve than current citizen and legal-resident recruits. That is because, in order to obtain status prior to enlistment, DREAM Act beneficiaries would have had to meet strict requirements. In addition to a criminal background check, they would have had to prove “good moral character,” which neither lawful permanent residents nor citizens must show to enlist.⁴⁰

The DREAM Act of 2017 was introduced in July, 2017, by Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-South Carolina) with original co-sponsors Sens. Dick Durbin (D-Illinois), Jeff Flake (R-Arizona), and Chuck Schumer (D-New York). Similar to the DREAM Act of 2010, the bill would allow certain undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. at a young age to gain conditional legal status. One way these young immigrants could change their status to lawful permanent residency is by serving honorably in the military for at least two years.⁴¹ The bill also has been introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives by Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-California) and Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Florida).⁴²

Also in the House, the Recognizing America’s Children Act, introduced by Rep. Carlos Curbelo (R-Florida), would grant conditional residence to certain undocumented immigrants who came to the U.S. as children. Under the legislation, young immigrants could serve in the military in an active-duty status for at least three years as one pathway to earning lawful permanent resident status.⁴³ Another bill, the bipartisan ENLIST Act, introduced by Rep. Jeff Denham (R-California), would provide legal status to certain undocumented immigrants who enlist in a regular or active-duty component of the armed forces.⁴⁴

Additionally, in the Senate, the SUCCEED Act, introduced by Sens. Thom Tillis (R-North Carolina), James Lankford (R-Oklahoma), and Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), and the Border Security and Deferred Action Recipient Relief Act, introduced by Sen. Jeff Flake (R-Arizona), would also provide legal status to certain undocumented immigrants. One track to permanent resident status provided for in these bills is to enlist and serve in the armed forces.⁴⁵ If enacted, each of these bills would increase the pool of potential military recruits.

Many long-term-resident undocumented youth would like to serve our country by joining the military. But without a legislative solution that gives them a chance to earn legal status, this population of potential recruits remains unavailable.



PROFILES

OSCAR VASQUEZ:

UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT REALIZES HIS DREAM TO ENLIST

Oscar Vasquez was 12 when his mother brought him to the U.S. from Mexico. In high school, he joined the junior ROTC and was recognized with an “Officer of the Year” award. During his sophomore year, soon after Sept. 11, he talked to a recruiter about joining the Army but was told he could not enlist because he was undocumented. With his path to military service blocked, he focused on engineering and joined a team of four undocumented students from his high school. The team won a national robotics competition, competing against teams from prestigious engineering colleges such as MIT. He obtained a degree in engineering from Arizona State University. He eventually gained residency through his marriage to a U.S. citizen and finally was able to realize his dream of joining the military. After basic training in 2011, he was deployed to Afghanistan as a paratrooper and gained U.S. citizenship through his military service. He now volunteers with the robotics programs at two high schools in Fort Worth, Texas.⁴⁶

PART 3

IMMIGRANT SERVICE MEMBERS' CONCERNS ABOUT FAMILY

Just as in the general population, some of our military have family members who are undocumented immigrants. It is estimated that at least 9 million people live in mixed-status families that include at least one unauthorized adult and at least one U.S.-born child.⁴⁷ Members of such families desperately want to attain legal status, but our broken immigration system does not give them the option. When service members are stationed thousands of miles away from family, they feel powerless to help. The stress over a parent, spouse, child or sibling who has no legal status weighs heavily on them and may adversely affect their ability to focus on a mission, particularly if the family member is deported. Many are afraid to deploy for fear that something may happen to their family.⁴⁸

Margaret Stock, a retired lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army Reserve and former professor at West Point Military Academy, has warned that the government has created an “extremely complex and often arbitrary system of immigration laws and regulations without full attention to the detrimental impact that this system has on the readiness of the U.S. armed forces.” She went on to note that this could affect thousands of service members.⁴⁹

With Congress unable to reform immigration laws, the Obama administration acted to alleviate this burden on our service members by expanding the use of an existing policy that allowed undocumented family members of active military, reserves and veterans to stay in the U.S. The policy was called “parole in place.”⁵⁰

The undocumented spouse of an armed forces member who is eligible for permanent residence based on his or her marriage to the soldier or officer is someone who might benefit from the policy. Parole in place allows the spouse to remain in the U.S. and to adjust his or her status to lawful permanent resident. Without that allowance, the undocumented spouse, in order to obtain the immigrant visa for permanent residence, would have to leave the U.S., triggering provisions of the law pertaining to unlawful presence that would force him or her to remain outside the U.S. for years.

The policy provided welcome relief to many service members who no longer had to fear that their loved ones would be deported. While the policy remains in place as of this writing, the Trump administration has not indicated whether it will continue.⁵¹

The military creates a deep sense of family among its ranks. To defend brothers and sisters in arms is one of the service member's most sacred duties. No service member should have to endure the emotional toll of defending a nation that may very well deport family members who live in the U.S.



PROFILES

DAVID AND FANNY LOPEZ: SERVICE MEMBER DEPENDS ON SUPPORT OF UNDOCUMENTED WIFE

David and Fanny Lopez were married in 2008. David, a U.S. citizen and member of the Army Reserve, hoped to sponsor his new wife for a green card. But Fanny had entered the U.S. without authorization when she was a child and faced possible deportation. Two years later, David was deployed to Afghanistan, leaving him uncertain about whether Fanny would be there when he came home. Fanny heard about an opportunity to be granted parole in place by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, although at the time it was offered only rarely. In addition, she found that her husband needed to be in the U.S. at the time of application, which was impossible while he was deployed. Like many veterans, when David returned home he struggled to readjust to civilian life. He leaned on Fanny for emotional and other support but also worried about her future in the U.S. Fanny has provided a service to this country by helping David adjust. Only after hiring a persistent lawyer was the couple able to fight through a maze of red tape and succeed in getting parole for Fanny. Today, Fanny has legal residency and thus always can be available to support her husband and family.⁵²

PART 4

VETERANS FACED WITH FAMILY SEPARATION OR DEPORTATION

When service members return home, they often rely on family to help them reintegrate into their daily lives. They may suffer from combat stress, post-traumatic stress disorder or other mental-health issues. They may have physical injuries that need time to heal. As they leave the service, they will need to find jobs and health care and manage the maze of veterans' benefits. Most veterans count on family for care and emotional support during this adjustment.

A veteran's family is the key to a successful transition into civilian life, and the stress of potential deportation undermines these efforts... As service members return home, our nation should not abandon them by forcing a family member to leave. Immigration reform would show many of our veterans that the country they defended overseas has not abandoned them upon their return.

If members of the military or veterans have family who are undocumented, they risk losing a vital support system. A veteran's family is the key to a successful transition into civilian life, and the stress of potential deportation undermines these efforts. Family members have to worry not only about the future of the returning service member, but also about their own future in the U.S. As service members return home, our nation should not abandon them by forcing a family member to leave. Immigration reform would show many of our veterans that the country they defended overseas has not abandoned them upon their return.

Some immigrant veterans themselves are deported after their military service. Changes to the law in the 1990s greatly expanded the categories of crimes for which immigrants could be removed and permanently barred from the U.S. This fate — permanent banishment from the country for which they risked their lives — has befallen a growing number of military veterans.⁵³ Although immigrants serving in the armed services are eligible for a fast track to citizenship, many are not aware of the process, and the military could do more to make them aware of the opportunity.⁵⁴

After leaving the military, some veterans — many of whom are battling unemployment or physical or psychological stress from their service — get into trouble with the law. If their crime is considered an “aggravated felony” under immigration law, they face deportation and permanent banishment after they



are processed through our criminal justice system, and a judge may not consider their military service as grounds for leniency. Many veterans who are deported are unable to access the veterans benefits to which they are entitled and face permanent separation from their families.⁵⁵ This separation means many are no longer able to support their family members still living in the U.S.

In the words of Lt. Col. Carter Crewe, U.S. Air Force (Ret.), Co-Chair, Veterans Advisory Committee for Veterans Association of North County (Oceanside, California), and Veterans for New Americans partner, “Immigrants have served in our military from the time of our foundation to the present. We have overpromised and under delivered to our immigrant veterans. A one-mistake deportation policy is unjust and wrong for immigrant veterans who have the right at death to be buried in our national cemeteries.”

Members of our military and veterans have risked their lives for our country and have earned America’s respect. We should honor them by giving them the tools to naturalize and to keep their families together.

PROFILES

RICARDO PINEDA AND VERONICA CASTRO: ARMY VETERAN FEARS POSSIBLE DEPORTATION OF HIS WIFE

Ricardo Pineda is an Army veteran, honorably discharged for medical reasons in 2014 after serving for six years. When he served in South Korea, stress wore him down. He worried about his 17-year-old child, who suffered brain damage during heart surgery as a toddler and ended up in the hospital four times while Pineda was deployed. Another of Pineda's sons has cerebral palsy. His wife, Veronica Castro, was taking care of these and two other children, but she is an undocumented immigrant. Pineda applied for parole in place but she was denied because of a previous deportation and is now ineligible for immigration relief. She must check in periodically with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and could be detained and deported. In her most recent check-in, in April 2017, ICE exercised its discretion to grant Castro another year. If she is ultimately deported, Pineda says, he will be forced to move the family to Mexico, even if that means his two disabled children would not be able to receive high-quality medical attention. "I swore to protect this nation and asking for a little bit of protection for my family, I don't think that is too much to ask for," Pineda said.⁵⁶

ENRIQUE SALAS GARCIA: VETERAN DEPORTED IN PART BECAUSE HE FAILED TO NATURALIZE

Enrique Salas Garcia arrived in the U.S. with his family as a boy in 1977. During his early teen years, he dreamed of joining the Marines. After Garcia turned 17, his parents granted him permission to enlist one week after he graduated from high school. Salas served four years in the Far East and the Persian Gulf, after which he was honorably discharged. He remained in the Marine Corps Reserve for an additional four years. His reintegration into civilian life did not go smoothly, and he struggled with drug abuse. In 2001, he pleaded guilty to possession of a controlled substance, and in 2004 he was convicted for possession of a controlled substance for sale. He was sentenced to time served, a little over six months in jail. His 2004 conviction was considered an "aggravated felony" under immigration law, and he was deported. Despite his military service, there was no leniency for his past conviction. He learned too late that he had been eligible to become a U.S. citizen immediately upon discharge from the Marine Corps in 1992. He was not given the information at the time.⁵⁷

PART 5

IMMIGRATION REFORM WOULD MAKE OUR NATION MORE SECURE AND HONOR IMMIGRANTS' SERVICE

Many military leaders and veterans have called for immigration reform that will support immigrant service members and their families and allow undocumented immigrants who want to serve in our nation's military to do so. Their voices have been strong in advocating for a permanent solution to our broken immigration system:

DAVID S. C. CHU, FORMER UNDERSECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR PERSONNEL AND

READINESS: *"If their parents are undocumented or in immigration limbo, most of these young people have no mechanism to obtain legal residency even if they have lived most of their lives here. Yet many of these young people may wish to join the military, and have the attributes needed — education, aptitude, fitness and moral qualifications."*⁵⁸

JOSH WHITFIELD, COMBAT VETERAN WHO EARNED THE BRONZE STAR AND PURPLE HEART WHILE DEPLOYED IN IRAQ AND MEMBER OF THE WATERFORD, CALIFORNIA, CITY COUNCIL:

*"I have served with people from all walks of life. I can tell you that when you're patrolling dangerous territory halfway around the world, the blessings we have in our country become engraved in your mind. I can think of no more honorable way to earn U.S. citizenship than in military service to our country."*⁵⁹

MAJ. GEN. ANTONIO TAGUBA, U.S. ARMY (RET.) AND VETERANS FOR NEW AMERICANS PARTNER:

*"As with all sectors of society, immigrants have a long and proud history of service in our country's armed forces. They add to our military's readiness and strong capabilities to protect our nation. Today, more than ever, new Americans contribute to the strength and diversity in each of the military services. Supporting bipartisan immigration reform will sustain the positive impact both for our national security and economic power, while at the same time support our immigrant service members and their respective families."*⁶⁰





**CAPT. GRACIELA TISCAREÑO-SATO,
U.S. AIR FORCE VETERAN AND VETERANS
FOR NEW AMERICANS PARTNER:**

*"Our national security and military strength rely solely on our all-volunteer force. Some of the most patriotic men and women in uniform are sons and daughters of refugees. When refugees and their children choose to serve in our armed forces, their language and cultural-competency skills become immediately invaluable assets that enhance our military readiness. These diverse skill sets found in our service members born outside our national borders enable us to exert influence globally and effectively."*⁶¹



**LT. COL. L. CARTER CREWE III, U.S.
AIR FORCE (RET.), CO-CHAIR, VETERANS
ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR VETERANS
ASSOCIATION OF NORTH COUNTY
(OCEANSIDE, CALIFORNIA), AND VETERANS
FOR NEW AMERICANS PARTNER:**

*"Through my 29 years of service, I have gained a special appreciation for my immigrant brothers and sisters in uniform who have put themselves in harm's way on behalf of all Americans. Today, more than ever, we need to honor their tremendous contributions by updating our national immigration laws to fully address the unique immigration challenges faced by new American veterans and their families."*⁶²



Veterans for New Americans calls on Congress and the White House to modernize our immigration process and pass reforms that take national security and military readiness needs into account. Specifically, Veterans for New Americans makes the following policy recommendations:

- **Ensure immigrants are included in our military force readiness plans to meet any global or national security challenge effectively.**
- **Support immigrant service members by providing an efficient pathway to citizenship as part of their service.**
- **Ensure new-American veterans receive care for service-related conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental-health disorders, as well as support for reducing the risk of behaviors that may lead to deportation.**
- **Provide support for families of new-American service members and veterans.**
- **Support transition initiatives for immigrant service members and veterans to the public and private workforce.**

Implementing these policy recommendations will ensure that our service members focus on their mission and have support from their families while they are deployed and when they return home, keep the pool of potential service members as broad as possible by including the millions of young undocumented people who were brought to the U.S. as children, and ensure that each branch of the armed forces does everything possible to make sure noncitizen soldiers understand their opportunities for citizenship and help them secure all the rights they deserve for defending our nation. We must. This is the right thing to do for our national security, the future of our military, our veterans and our nation.





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50 F Street, NW, Suite 300,
Washington, D.C. 20001

T (202) 347-0040

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ABOUT VETERANS FOR NEW AMERICANS

Veterans for New Americans, a project of the **National Immigration Forum**, is a national network of influential veterans representing each of the military branches who support a bipartisan solution on immigration that strengthens our national security, enhances our military readiness and supports our immigrant service members, their spouses and immediate family both at home and abroad.

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The **National Immigration Forum** advocates for the value of immigrants and immigration to our nation. Founded in 1982, the Forum plays a leading role in the national debate about immigration, knitting together innovative alliances across diverse business, faith, immigrant, law enforcement and veterans constituencies in communities across the country. Coming together under the Forum's leadership, these alliances develop and execute legislative and administrative policy positions and advocacy strategies. Leveraging our policy education and communications expertise, the Forum works for comprehensive immigration reform, sound border-security policies and balanced enforcement of immigration laws, as well as to ensure that new Americans have the opportunities, skills and status to reach their fullest potential.

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