

# Comprehensive Immigration Reform and the Latino Community in Georgia

## Introduction

The Latino community in the United States—and specifically in Georgia—is vital to the state’s economic, cultural, and civic life. Yet many Latino residents, particularly those who are undocumented, underdocumented, or part of mixed-status families, live under persistent fear and insecurity due to outdated and punitive immigration laws and indiscriminate enforcement.<sup>1</sup>

Despite growing bipartisan acknowledgment of the need for reform, comprehensive immigration legislation with a path to legalization for millions of contributing residents without criminal backgrounds remains stalled at the federal level. Georgia, home to over one million Latinos who are overrepresented in key economic sectors—agribusiness (farms and poultry), construction, hospitality, and carpet manufacturing—illustrates the urgency of this issue. The status quo directly harms the state as a whole by destabilizing families, suppressing economic contributions, and eroding trust in public institutions.<sup>2</sup>

## Current Federal Immigration Policy Landscape

The federal government holds broad authority over immigration law. State-based policies often complement federal legislation by expanding or restricting access based on discretion—a reality that fundamentally creates a patchwork of experiences for immigrants depending on where they live.

We believe it is the role of the federal government to address the key issues noted below as priorities, setting a standard in which policy meets labor, economic development, and human rights imperatives:

- **Lack of Legalization Pathways:** Millions of undocumented immigrants—including DACA and TPS recipients and essential workers—lack a path to legal status.<sup>3</sup>
- **Enforcement-Focused Infrastructure:** Current policies emphasize detention, deportation, and surveillance, with little investment in integration or protection of human and civil rights. Programs like 287(g) and laws like Georgia’s HB 1105, which deputize local law enforcement to act as immigration agents, have disproportionately impacted Latino communities.<sup>4</sup>
- **Backlogged Asylum and Visa Systems:** Immigrant families often wait years for visa processing or asylum adjudication, prolonging family separation and instability.

2025 marks the 13th anniversary of DACA—a temporary solution for children who arrived before 2008, were enrolled in school, and have no criminal background. For over twelve years, these individuals have waited for

the chance to be recognized as fully legal residents so they can attain their educational aspirations, attend a college of their choice, and pay in-state tuition. This is a missed opportunity to invest in true Americans who want to—and already have been—contributing to the only country they call home.

In Georgia, without federal intervention, immigrant populations continue to grow while facing increasing criminalization and fear—without intentional support from state government.

## Impact on the Latino Community in Georgia

### 1. Legal Vulnerability and Family Separation

Over 350,000 undocumented immigrants live in Georgia, and 53% of Latino households in the state include at least one foreign-born family member.<sup>2</sup> Local cooperation with ICE through 287(g) agreements has created pervasive fear of law enforcement, reducing Latino residents' willingness to report crimes, seek help, or participate in civic life. Family separation due to detention or deportation has left deep psychological and economic scars in communities across the state. At the beginning of 2026, 77% of people in immigration detention had no criminal or violent background.<sup>5</sup>

### 2. Economic and Workforce Suppression

Latinos are essential to Georgia's economy, particularly in agriculture, construction, logistics, hospitality, and food services. Latino workers contribute over \$21.5 billion in purchasing power and pay more than \$1.4 billion in taxes annually.<sup>2</sup> Yet many workers—especially those in mixed-status families—face job insecurity, wage theft, and a lack of workplace protections. Comprehensive immigration reform would stabilize labor markets, reduce worker exploitation, and grow Georgia's economy by expanding legal workforce participation.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. Mental Health and Community Trauma

Persistent threats of ICE raids, deportations, and anti-immigrant rhetoric contribute to chronic stress, depression, and trauma—particularly among children and youth. Research cited in the *State of Latinos in Georgia* report shows that youth in mixed-status households are more likely to experience fear, absenteeism, and mental health crises.<sup>2</sup> The absence of stable legal protections intensifies these outcomes and limits access to services such as therapy, healthcare, and housing support.

### 4. Educational Disparities and Youth Exclusion

Latino youth in Georgia face multiple barriers to educational attainment. Undocumented students are barred from admission to several of Georgia's top public universities and denied access to in-state tuition—even if they have lived in Georgia for most of their lives.<sup>4</sup> These policies isolate students and limit their ability to achieve economic stability. DACA recipients face continued uncertainty about their long-term futures as legal protections remain under judicial challenge and no permanent solution has been passed by Congress.

## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Comprehensive immigration reform is not merely a legal issue—it is a racial justice, economic, and public health priority. Latino communities in Georgia and across the United States need a pathway to legalization and citizenship, protection from deportation, and integration into civic life. To achieve this, Congress must:

- Create inclusive legalization pathways for undocumented immigrants, including DACA and TPS recipients without criminal or violent backgrounds.
- End or discourage participation in local-federal enforcement collaborations—such as 287(g) and HB 1105—that are unequivocally documented as damaging to communities.
- Expand mental health, education, and integration programs tailored to immigrant communities.
- Remove state-level restrictions that bar undocumented youth from accessing higher education and economic opportunity.

**Without reform, Georgia risks continued instability, missed economic growth, and the marginalization of one of its most vital populations. Now is the time for action rooted in dignity, justice, and community resilience.**

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## References & Sources

- [1] National Immigration Law Center. (2024). "Overview of Immigrant Eligibility for Federal Programs." <https://www.nilc.org>
- [2] Latino Community Fund Georgia. (2024). State of Latinos in Georgia. <https://www.stateoflatinosga.org>
- [3] National Immigration Law Center. (2024). "DACA: Status and Challenges." <https://www.nilc.org/issues/daca/>
- [4] American Immigration Council. (2024). "The 287(g) Program: An Overview" and "Immigrants in Georgia." <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org>
- [5] Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC), Syracuse University. (2026). Immigration Detention Data. <https://trac.syr.edu>