

## **Veteran Service Recognition Act**

Immigrants have served in the U.S. armed forces in every major conflict since the Revolutionary War. Today, there are approximately 45,000 immigrants actively serving in the U.S. armed forces. In return for their service, we must honor their sacrifices by supporting them and their families and giving them every opportunity to become U.S. citizens if they so desire.

Unfortunately, non-citizen veterans have been removed before they can become U.S. citizens. Many times, such removals are due to a conviction for a crime stemming from trauma that occurred during the veteran's service in the U.S. armed forces. This means that a veteran who risked their life for our country and suffered long-lasting mental health problems as a result may be deported, separating them from their family and preventing them from accessing the Veteran Affairs benefits they are eligible for.

We can and must do better by our immigrant veterans. This bill recognizes the service of our noncitizen veterans by: (1) making it easier for noncitizen service members to apply for naturalization while in the armed forces; (2) establishing a review process for noncitizen veterans, active service members, and their families who are in removal proceedings; (3) providing an opportunity for noncitizen veterans who have been removed or ordered removed and who have not been convicted of serious crimes, to obtain legal permanent resident status; and (4) allowing the immediate relatives of service members or veterans with an approved immigrant petition to be able to adjust their status and obtain a green card as long as they are otherwise admissible.

- First, the bill makes it easier for noncitizens who serve in the Armed Forces to naturalize. The bill directs the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Defense to implement a program that allows noncitizen service members to file for naturalization during basic training, or as early as otherwise possible.
- Second, the bill directs the Department of Homeland Security to establish a Military Family Immigration Advisory Committee. This committee will review the cases of noncitizen veterans and active service members in removal proceedings and will provide recommendations on whether prosecutorial discretion is warranted, or whether the removal proceedings should continue.

- Third, the bill provides an opportunity for noncitizen veterans who have been removed or ordered removed and who have not been convicted of serious crimes to apply for and obtain legal permanent resident status if it is in the public interest. The Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security cannot waive grounds of inadmissibility based on serious crimes such as murder, rape, sexual abuse of a minor, child pornography, slavery, involuntary servitude, trafficking in persons, human smuggling (non-family members), and treason.
- Finally, the bill allows immediate relatives of service members or veterans with an approved immigrant petition to be able to adjust their status and obtain a green card as long as they are admissible. The bill includes narrow, discretionary waivers aimed at helping the spouses, children, and parents of U.S. citizen service members and veterans who are in the United States but cannot adjust because they entered without inspection or are inadmissible for other reasons related to the way they entered the country.

The Veteran Service Recognition Act provides a narrowly tailored solution to a specific problem. This is a closed universe with a small and finite number of individuals who are eligible for relief (The number of deported noncitizen veterans is estimated to be in the hundreds). Additionally, by addressing the naturalization of noncitizen service members on the front end (e.g., during basic training), this bill will eventually eliminate the need to assist deported veterans in returning to the United States.