FEDERAL IMMIGRATION AND WORKFORCE POLICY

The Yellow Card Act

Bipartisan Discussion Draft — Version 2 (author-corrected November 10, 2026)

A paid, vetted, temporary status that brings long-term residents out of the shadows, paired with anti-smuggling enforcement, border integrity, and enforceable labor standards.

DOCUMENT STATUS: Discussion draft — not introduced in Congress. For stakeholder feedback only. General information, not legal advice.

Prepared by: USIC — United States Immigrant Center

Version note (v2): At the author's direction (November 10, 2026), this version corrects the population at the center of the Act. The Yellow Card is for people **already living in the United States** — long-term residents who have built lives here over many years without status. An application channel for persons abroad is **not** part of this Act; it is reserved as a possible future phase for Congress to consider only after the pilot is evaluated. All references to overseas application in version 1 are superseded.

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READING NOTE: This draft is deliberately narrower than comprehensive immigration reform. It is structured as a five-year federal pilot so Congress can test compliance, labor-market, security, and fiscal outcomes before any permanent

program is considered. Drafting counsel should review the eligibility threshold, the interaction with pending asylum applications and removal proceedings, benefit restrictions, appropriations, fee authority, privacy protections, and the travel mechanism before introduction.

1. One-page summary — the deal

Out of the shadows. Into the light — screened, paying, accountable. Enforcement aimed at smugglers, not families.

The problem

Millions of people have lived in the United States for ten, twenty, thirty years — working, paying taxes, raising U.S.-citizen children — entirely outside the legal system. The government does not know who they are: no biometrics on file, no screening, no record. Employers can exploit them because they cannot safely complain. Smugglers and traffickers profit from their vulnerability. The current debate offers only two doors, and both are closed: mass removal of a population woven into the economy for decades is unworkable, and permanent legalization cannot pass. The result is a permanent shadow population — the worst outcome for security, for workers, and for the rule of law.

The solution

Create a five-year Yellow Card pilot for long-term residents already in the United States: come forward, register, submit biometrics, and pass criminal, security, trafficking, and fraud screening. Participants pay the full administrative cost, work only for E-Verify employers, remain tax-compliant, obey labor and criminal laws, and receive a three-year renewable temporary work card. The status carries no federal means-tested benefits and no vote. It is temporary and revocable. **It is not lawful permanent residence, it never converts into it, and it creates no path to citizenship.** Paired with the status: dedicated anti-smuggling enforcement and border-integrity measures aimed at the criminal networks and at future unlawful flows — not at the families who have been here for decades.

What Republicans get

- A shadow population brought into the open: identified, biometrically enrolled, security-screened, and tax-compliant — the government finally knows who is here.

- Mandatory E-Verify, self-funded administration, no federal means-tested benefits, no voting, and revocation for fraud or felony conviction.
- Dedicated anti-smuggling investigations, stronger penalties, measurable border-integrity benchmarks, and a five-year sunset unless Congress affirmatively reauthorizes.

What Democrats get

- An end to a permanently exploitable underclass: families out of the shadows, able to work in the open and report abuse without fear.
- Prevailing-wage rules, workplace-rights enforcement, anti-retaliation safeguards, portability between qualified employers, and access to immigration-court capacity.
- Independent oversight, public reporting, due-process procedures before revocation, privacy limits, and a voluntary, fully self-paid health option with no federal subsidy.

THE LEGISLATIVE ASK: Invite a bipartisan House and Senate working group to test the framework, request technical assistance from the Department of Homeland Security and Department of Labor, obtain a formal Congressional Budget Office score, and prepare introduction in the 120th Congress.

2. Findings

Congress finds the following:

1. Undocumented immigrants paid an estimated $96.7 billion in federal, state, and local taxes in tax year 2022. This figure is a modeled estimate, not an administrative count.

2. One modeled analysis estimates that full work authorization for the existing undocumented population would increase annual tax payments by $40.2 billion, to $136.9 billion. This is a think-tank projection and not a Congressional Budget Office score.

3. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime estimated annual migrant-smuggling revenues of $3.7 billion to $4.2 billion on the route to the United States using 2016 data. A 2025 peer-reviewed analysis suggests current revenues may exceed $8 billion. These estimates concern revenues, not profits.

4. Reported smuggling fees commonly range from $5,000 to $20,000 or more per person, depending on origin, route, nationality, and criminal network. A single flat price does not describe the market accurately.

5. U.S. Customs and Border Protection recorded approximately 10.8 million enforcement encounters nationwide during fiscal years 2021 through 2024: 1.96 million, 2.77 million, 3.20 million, and 2.90 million, respectively. Encounters are not unique individuals and include repeat encounters and multiple enforcement categories.

6. Undocumented households paid an estimated $89.8 billion in taxes and held $299 billion in spending power in 2023, underscoring both economic participation and the costs of work occurring outside stable legal channels.

7. A registration-and-screening channel for the existing long-term population is most credible when paired with border enforcement against future unlawful flows, employer accountability, worker protections, independent measurement, and an automatic sunset absent congressional reauthorization.

8. No State may create federal immigration status. The pilot established by this Act is exclusively federal; State and local governments may assist with ordinary labor enforcement and service coordination only as otherwise authorized by law.

EVIDENCE STANDARD: Unsupported claims about immigrant remittances, unpaid taxes, total earnings, and economic "value" are not used in this draft. Appendix A states every retained figure with its source and limitation.

3. Bill text

A BILL

To establish a temporary, self-funded conditional status for screened long-term residents of the United States; to strengthen anti-smuggling enforcement and border integrity; to protect workers and taxpayers; and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SEC. 1. Short title.

This Act may be cited as the "Yellow Card Act".

SEC. 2. Definitions.

Term	Meaning
Cardholder	An alien granted Yellow Card status under section 102.
Long-term resident	An alien physically present in the United States who meets the continuous-presence requirement of section 102.
Registration center	A facility in the United States designated by the Secretary to receive applications and conduct screening under this Act.
Qualified employer	A United States employer enrolled and in good standing in E-Verify and compliant with Title IV.
Secretary	The Secretary of Homeland Security, except where another officer is expressly named.
Status	The temporary, conditional nonimmigrant classification created by this Act.

DRAFTING NOTE: Legislative counsel should place the new classification within the Immigration and Nationality Act, conform cross-references, and determine phased enrollment by registration window. The continuous-presence threshold in section 102 (drafted at 10 years) is the author's policy choice to confirm; the design intent is a population measured in decades of residence, not recent arrivals.

TITLE I — YELLOW CARD STATUS

SEC. 101. Establishment of pilot classification.

The Secretary shall establish a temporary Yellow Card classification for eligible long-term residents of the United States who come forward, register, and complete the screening required by this title. No grant under this title creates lawful permanent resident status, an entitlement to renewal, or an entitlement to remain after expiration or termination.

SEC. 102. Eligibility and registration.

An applicant shall—

- be physically present in the United States and establish continuous physical presence for not less than 10 years preceding the date of enactment, by a preponderance of evidence such as tax records, employment records, leases, school or medical records, or other reliable documentation;
- file an application in person at a designated registration center in the United States, or through a secure process established by the Secretary;
- provide biometrics, biographic information, identity documents, and any information reasonably required to establish identity and eligibility;
- complete criminal-history, national-security, terrorism, trafficking, fraud, and immigration-record checks;
- complete a health screening consistent with standards applicable to comparable status holders;
- demonstrate, where records exist, a history of tax filing or enter into compliance as a condition of approval; and
- pay the fee required by section 108, subject to no taxpayer subsidy.

Manner of entry is not itself a bar. An applicant is not ineligible solely because the applicant entered the United States without inspection, including through the southern border. Eligibility turns on length of residence, identity, screening results, and compliance — not on how the applicant arrived a decade or more ago.

The Secretary may deny an application where identity cannot be established, required screening is incomplete, the applicant is inadmissible on security or serious criminal grounds, or approval would create a specific public-safety risk. A denial shall state the basis, subject to protection of classified information, and provide a limited administrative review for material error.

SEC. 103. Relationship to asylum and protection claims.

Registration under this title is voluntary. Before approval, an applicant with a pending asylum application or pending removal proceedings shall receive a plain-language explanation, in a language the applicant understands, of the effect of a grant under this title on that application or proceeding, and shall make a knowing, voluntary, written election to proceed under this title. The election shall be subject to a 30-day withdrawal period before final approval. Legislative counsel shall determine the mechanics for pending proceedings, including administrative closure or termination upon grant.

Officers shall screen every applicant for coercion, trafficking, or facts suggesting a protection claim, and shall refer such cases for appropriate adjudication. No officer

may pressure an applicant to abandon a protection claim. Nothing in this section shall be construed to waive protection that cannot lawfully be waived, including withholding of removal or protection under the Convention Against Torture, or to authorize return of a person in violation of the laws of the United States.

SEC. 104. Admission to status, employment, and employer verification.

A cardholder is authorized to work for any qualified employer, subject to the labor protections in Title IV. Employment authorization shall be portable and may not be tied exclusively to one employer. Each qualified employer shall verify employment eligibility through E-Verify and retain confirmation records as required by the Secretary.

The Secretary of Labor may suspend an employer from participation for a pattern or practice of wage theft, retaliation, misclassification, unsafe working conditions, unlawful recruitment fees, or knowing misuse of the program.

SEC. 105. Duration and renewal.

Yellow Card status shall be valid for three years and may be renewed in three-year increments during the pilot. Renewal requires continued identity verification, payment of required taxes, compliance with employment and reporting rules, and no disqualifying criminal conduct. Renewal is discretionary and confers no right to permanent residence.

SEC. 106. Travel and reentry.

A cardholder may request advance authorization to travel outside the United States and return during the validity period. A single trip may not exceed six months unless the Secretary grants an extension for serious illness, family emergency, military orders, or other good cause. Reentry remains subject to inspection and screening. Legislative counsel shall conform this section to the applicant population's entry history, including any unlawful-presence consequences, so that authorized travel does not itself trigger inadmissibility.

SEC. 107. Benefits, voting, and public-charge neutrality.

A cardholder is not eligible, solely by reason of that status, for any federal means-tested public benefit. The Secretary shall publish a plain-language list of excluded programs and any benefits required by federal law notwithstanding this section.

Nothing in this Act confers the right to vote in any federal election. Yellow Card status shall not be treated as lawful permanent residence.

SEC. 108. Fees and self-funding.

The Secretary shall set application and renewal fees at a level reasonably calculated to recover the full direct and indirect cost of administering the program, including screening, adjudication, fraud detection, secure documents, compliance, and independent auditing. Fees shall be deposited in a dedicated Yellow Card Program Account and may be used only as authorized by this Act. The Secretary shall publish an annual fee and cost report.

SEC. 109. Revocation and due process.

The Secretary shall revoke status upon a final felony conviction, a material fraud finding in the application, intentional benefits fraud, a national-security determination supported by law, or repeated willful noncompliance with program conditions. Except where immediate action is required by a specific security threat, the cardholder shall receive written notice, an opportunity to respond, an administrative decision by an officer not involved in the initial allegation, and a record for judicial review as provided by law.

Minor traffic offenses, good-faith tax errors promptly corrected, reporting by a crime victim, and protected labor activity shall not independently support revocation.

SEC. 110. Military service and naturalization.

Yellow Card status creates no civilian path to citizenship. Congress may authorize an expedited path to naturalization for a cardholder who completes qualifying honorable service in the Armed Forces, subject to Department of Defense force-management needs, security standards, existing military-accession law, and implementing regulations jointly issued by the Secretaries of Defense and Homeland Security. Nothing in this section requires the Department of Defense to accept any applicant for service.

TITLE II — ANTI-SMUGGLING ENFORCEMENT

SEC. 201. Enhanced penalties for smuggling and trafficking.

Congress shall increase penalties, consistent with constitutional requirements, for organizers and financiers of migrant-smuggling operations; smuggling involving

minors, sexual exploitation, forced labor, kidnapping, extortion, serious bodily injury, or death; and laundering or transmitting proceeds derived from such conduct. Penalty enhancements shall target criminal organizers and knowing facilitators, not migrants solely because they were transported or exploited.

SEC. 202. Homeland Security Investigations task forces.

The Secretary shall expand multi-agency Homeland Security Investigations task forces focused on financial disruption of migrant-smuggling and human-trafficking networks, including intelligence analysis, cross-border financial investigations, asset tracing, victim identification, and coordination with willing foreign partners consistent with human-rights and privacy safeguards.

SEC. 203. Dedicated anti-smuggling allocation.

After fully funding program administration and required reserves, the Secretary may transfer a congressionally specified portion of net fee collections to a dedicated anti-smuggling enforcement account. No transfer may reduce screening, adjudication, labor enforcement, oversight, or due-process functions required by this Act. All transfers and uses shall be reported quarterly to Congress and audited annually.

SEC. 204. Financial disruption plan.

Within 180 days, the Secretary, in coordination with the Secretary of the Treasury and the Attorney General, shall submit a plan to identify, seize, and forfeit proceeds of covered smuggling offenses; improve suspicious-transaction information sharing as permitted by law; and measure disruption by networks dismantled, victims protected, assets restrained, prosecutions completed, and recurrence reduced — not by raw arrest counts alone.

TITLE III — BORDER INTEGRITY

SEC. 301. Integrity of the asylum system and of future flows.

Registration under Title I addresses the population already present. This title addresses the future: the Secretary shall maintain the separate asylum pathway so that registration applications do not enter the affirmative-asylum queue, and shall maintain border-enforcement and lawful-channel policies so that the Act is not read as an invitation to new unlawful entry. Persons who arrive after the eligibility

cutoff in section 102 acquire no eligibility under this Act by virtue of arrival or presence.

SEC. 302. Immigration-court capacity.

Congress shall authorize appropriations to the Department of Justice for additional immigration judges, judicial law clerks, interpreters, modern case-management technology, and legal-orientation services necessary to reduce pending caseloads while preserving fair hearings. Such funds shall supplement, not supplant, existing appropriations.

SEC. 303. Operational coordination and metrics.

The Secretaries of Homeland Security, State, Labor, and the Attorney General shall coordinate registration processing, identity and security checks, employer compliance, and court-capacity planning. Public quarterly dashboards shall report applications, approvals, denials, processing times, fraud findings, revocations, E-Verify compliance, labor violations, border encounters, smuggling investigations, and adjudication backlogs, with privacy-protective aggregation.

TITLE IV — WORKER PROTECTIONS

SEC. 401. Wage and working-condition standards.

A qualified employer shall pay a cardholder not less than the greater of the applicable federal, State, or local minimum wage; the prevailing wage determined for the occupation and area; or the wage paid to similarly situated United States workers. Cardholders shall receive the same workplace protections, payroll records, tax withholding, safety rights, and remedies available to similarly situated workers.

SEC. 402. Portability and recruitment fees.

A cardholder may change among qualified employers without prior permission, subject to prompt notice to the Secretary. An employer, recruiter, or agent may not charge a cardholder a job-placement, sponsorship, or recruitment fee. Contract terms waiving rights under this title are void as against public policy.

SEC. 403. Anti-retaliation and enforcement.

No person may discharge, threaten, blacklist, report to immigration authorities, or otherwise retaliate against a cardholder for reporting a violation, cooperating with an investigation, seeking unpaid wages, organizing with coworkers, or exercising a

right under law. The Secretary of Labor shall provide confidential complaint channels, civil penalties, back pay, reinstatement, debarment, and referral for prosecution where appropriate.

TITLE V — OPTIONAL YELLOW HEALTH COVERAGE

SEC. 501. Optional, participant-funded coverage.

The Secretary of Health and Human Services may approve a regulated health-coverage option available only by voluntary election of a cardholder. Participation shall not be a condition of status or employment. Premiums, deductibles, and participant contributions shall cover 100 percent of claims, administration, reserves, risk adjustment, and oversight attributable to the option.

SEC. 502. No federal subsidy or entitlement.

No federal appropriated funds, Medicaid funds, premium tax credits, cost-sharing reductions, Affordable Care Act marketplace subsidies, or other federal means-tested benefits may be used to subsidize coverage under this title. The United States shall not guarantee losses. Any plan must remain actuarially sound and maintain segregated accounts subject to annual independent audit.

SEC. 503. Consumer protections.

Approved coverage shall provide plain-language terms, licensed administration, nondiscrimination consistent with applicable law, claims and appeal procedures, provider-network disclosures, privacy protections, and an orderly wind-down plan. Employers may contribute only if contributions do not create coercion, debt bondage, or restrictions on job portability.

SEC. 504. Severability of Title V.

Title V is severable from every other provision of this Act. A judicial ruling, appropriation decision, failure to implement, or congressional repeal affecting Yellow Health shall not affect Yellow Card status, anti-smuggling enforcement, border integrity, worker protections, or oversight.

TITLE VI — OVERSIGHT, SUNSET, AND REAUTHORIZATION

SEC. 601. Five-year pilot and enrollment plan.

The authority to approve new applications shall expire five years after the first approval unless reauthorized by Congress. Within 180 days after enactment, the Secretary shall publish a phased enrollment plan, operational capacity limits, fraud controls, privacy impact assessment, and implementation schedule. No enrollment target shall override screening quality or labor-enforcement capacity.

SEC. 602. Government Accountability Office evaluation.

The Comptroller General shall issue interim reports at years 2 and 4 and a final report no later than 180 days before sunset. The reports shall evaluate fiscal performance, fee sufficiency, processing integrity, fraud, national-security screening, smuggling disruption, border trends, employer compliance, wages and displacement, tax compliance, health-option solvency, court backlogs, and participant outcomes.

SEC. 603. Formal budget score and reporting.

The sponsors shall request a formal Congressional Budget Office estimate before committee markup. Agency estimates, advocacy studies, and think-tank projections shall not be represented as a Congressional Budget Office score. The Secretary shall submit annual audited financial statements for the Yellow Card Program Account and disclose any cross-subsidy or unfunded liability.

SEC. 604. Reauthorization vote.

Continuation beyond the pilot requires affirmative reauthorization by Congress. A reauthorization proposal shall include the Government Accountability Office findings, the Congressional Budget Office estimate, agency performance data, and recommended changes. Absent reauthorization, existing cardholders may complete the then-current status period, subject to enforcement and orderly-transition rules, but no new grants or renewals may be issued after the statutory wind-down date.

SEC. 605. General severability.

If any provision of this Act, or its application to any person or circumstance, is held invalid, the remainder of the Act and the application of its remaining provisions shall not be affected, except as specifically provided in section 504.

4. Bipartisan design notes

The draft is built around reciprocal concessions. Each side receives enforceable policy, not messaging alone.

Provision	Republican concern	Democratic concern
Register + full vetting	The shadow population becomes known, enrolled, screened	Families come into the open without fear
Long-residence eligibility (10+ years)	Excludes recent arrivals; no magnet for new flows	Matches the population actually rooted here
Entry manner not a bar	One rule, honestly applied; security turns on screening, not history	Includes those who came through Mexico decades ago
E-Verify + tax compliance	Employer accountability; rule of law	Formal payroll and contribution record
No benefits or vote	Counters "amnesty" claim	Clear, narrow temporary status
Three-year status + sunset	No permanent entitlement	Stability with evidence-based renewal
Anti-smuggling funding	Disrupts criminal finance	Protects migrants from exploitation
Prevailing wage + portability	Protects U.S. workers	Prevents coercion and wage theft
Court funding	Faster lawful decisions	More capacity and fair hearings
Self-paid health option	Zero taxpayer subsidy	Voluntary coverage; less uncompensated care
GAO + CBO review	Independent accountability	Transparent outcomes before reauthorization

What this draft does not do

- It does not grant lawful permanent residence, blanket legalization, voting rights, or federal means-tested benefits.
- **It does not open an application channel for persons abroad.** An overseas channel is a possible future phase, to be considered only after the pilot's evaluation; it is not part of this Act.
- It does not permit States to create immigration status; the classification is exclusively federal.
- It does not require the Armed Forces to accept cardholders or guarantee naturalization through military service.

- It does not use program fees for anti-smuggling work until administration, screening, labor enforcement, oversight, and reserves are fully funded.
- It does not characterize private projections as official Congressional Budget Office estimates.
- It does not replace the asylum system or authorize removal contrary to nonwaivable federal or treaty protections.

Open questions for bipartisan negotiation

- The continuous-presence threshold (drafted at 10 years) and the evidentiary standard for proving it.
- Phased enrollment windows, any annual cap, and processing capacity by region.
- Exact criminal inadmissibility and revocation standards, waiver authority, and review procedures.
- Mechanics for applicants with pending asylum cases or removal proceedings, and the enforceable scope of the section 103 election.
- Fee level, reserve requirements, and the fraction — if any — available for anti-smuggling enforcement.
- The military-service naturalization mechanism and whether a nonmilitary earned adjustment pathway should be considered after the pilot.
- Appropriations level and performance targets for immigration-court capacity.
- Whether Yellow Health should remain in the introduced bill or proceed as a separate, severable title.
- Whether — and only after the pilot — an application channel for persons abroad should be designed as a separate future phase.

NEGOTIATING PRINCIPLE: Do not trade away the paired structure. Accountability for those already here without border integrity for the future will lose the right; enforcement without a way out of the shadows and worker safeguards will lose the left. The durable center is the package.

APPENDIX A — Verified numbers

These are the only quantitative claims approved for use in the advocacy package. Each should be presented with its date and limitation.

Measure	Verified figure	Period	Required caveat
Taxes paid	$96.7B	2022	Estimated; modeled, not

			count
With work authorization	+$40.2B/yr	2022 base	Projection; not CBO score
U.S.-route smuggling	$3.7–4.2B/yr	2016	Revenue, not profit
Updated smuggling view	$8B+	2025	Recent analysis; model-based
Smuggling fee	$5K–$20K+	2016–24	Varies by route/nationality
CBP encounters	~10.8M	FY21–24	Not unique individuals
Taxes / spending power	$89.8B / $299B	2023	Household estimates

Source notes

ITEP tax estimate and work-authorization projection. Undocumented immigrants paid an estimated $96.7 billion in federal, state, and local taxes in 2022. The same analysis projects an additional $40.2 billion per year under full work authorization, bringing the total to $136.9 billion. Both are modeled estimates; the latter is not a CBO score.

UNODC smuggling-revenue estimate. Using 2016 data, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime estimated $3.7–4.2 billion in annual revenues on the route to the United States. Say "revenues," not "profits."

PNAS updated analysis. A 2025 peer-reviewed analysis suggests U.S.-route smuggling revenues may exceed $8 billion. Present this as an analytical estimate, not an audited market total.

CBP enforcement encounters. CBP recorded approximately 10.8 million nationwide enforcement encounters from FY2021 through FY2024: 1.96M, 2.77M, 3.20M, and 2.90M. Encounters are not unique people and include repeat encounters and multiple enforcement categories.

American Immigration Council household estimates. Undocumented households paid an estimated $89.8 billion in taxes and held $299 billion in spending power in 2023.

Smuggling-fee range

Published Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and news reporting from 2016–2024 commonly places fees between

$5,000 and $20,000 or more per person, with higher figures for some routes and nationalities. The draft uses a range rather than a flat $20,000 price because no single average accurately describes the market.

Claims removed from the package

Removed claim	Reason
More than $200B in immigrant remittances	Incorrect for total U.S. outflows; the figure does not match a standard U.S. aggregate.
$40–60B in undocumented remittances	No authoritative source separates U.S. remittance outflows by the sender's immigration status.
$24–31B in unpaid taxes	Unsourced; replaced with the ITEP $40.2B modeled work-authorization difference.
$466B in earnings / $90–100B in "value"	Unsourced as stated; replaced with tax and spending-power estimates that can be cited.

APPENDIX B — Sponsor target map — 119th Congress

TIMING: The 120th Congress convenes January 3, 2027. Re-verify every chair, roster, district, bill status, and legal/political development after the November 3, 2026 midterms. The realistic 2026 objective is a discussion draft, technical briefings, and coalition formation — not final passage.

Recommended opening sponsor structure

Open with a four-corner working group: Salazar and Escobar in the House; Lankford and Gallego in the Senate. Add a border-district validator, an employer/workforce Republican, a labor-protection Democrat, and a committee gatekeeper before public rollout. Do not announce a "bipartisan" bill until at least one credible member from each party has accepted a substantive drafting role.

Tier 1 — House Republicans

Target	District	Strategic role
María Elvira Salazar	R-FL-27	Natural GOP lead; DIGNIDAD sponsor
Tony Gonzales	R-TX-23	Border validator; enforcement + visas
Dan Newhouse	R-WA-4	Farm-workforce and

		employer cover
Brian Fitzpatrick	R-PA-1	Former FBI; Problem Solvers credibility
Juan Ciscomani	R-AZ-6	Border district; bipartisan workforce work

Tier 1 — House Democrats

Target	District	Strategic role
Veronica Escobar	D-TX-16	Natural Democratic co-lead; DIGNIDAD partner
Henry Cuellar	D-TX-28	Enforcement-friendly border Democrat; verify legal status before public elevation

Tier 1 — Senate

Target	Party/State	Strategic role
Ruben Gallego	D-AZ	Natural Democratic lead; border + earned status
Mark Kelly	D-AZ	National-security validator
Chris Murphy	D-CT	2024 border-deal negotiator
Alex Padilla	D-CA	Immigration-subcommittee gatekeeper
James Lankford	R-OK	Natural GOP lead; 2024 deal negotiator

Secondary targets and early-cosponsor pool

Target	Party/District	Reason to engage
David Valadao	R-CA-22	Farm workforce; DIGNIDAD
Vicente Gonzalez	D-TX-34	Border-district moderate
Gabe Vasquez	D-NM-2	Border workforce policy
Zoe Lofgren	D-CA-18	Senior immigration-policy validator
Susan Collins	R-ME	Moderate Senate dealmaker
Thom Tillis	R-NC	Retiring; useful lame-duck validator
Mike Lawler	R-NY-17	DIGNIDAD early-

		cosponsor pool
Don Bacon	R-NE-2	DIGNIDAD early-cosponsor pool
Adriano Espaillat	D-NY-13	DIGNIDAD; Hispanic Caucus reach

Gatekeepers to brief before introduction

- Rep. Tom McClintock (R-CA), House immigration subcommittee chair: restrictionist leanings make early technical engagement essential. Treat him as a gatekeeper, not someone to bypass.
- Sen. Alex Padilla (D-CA), ranking member of the Senate Judiciary border and immigration subcommittee: engage on labor standards, due process, asylum safeguards, and court capacity.
- Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX), current Senate border-subcommittee chair: research indicates he is a lame duck serving through January 3, 2027; verify status and use the remaining term for technical review and Texas-border feedback.

Coalition validators

Validator	**Value to coalition**
National Immigration Forum	Center-right bridge; counters "amnesty" framing
American Business Immigration Coalition	Employer demand and Republican-leaning business voices
U.S. Chamber of Commerce	National employer credibility for lawful workforce
Evangelical Immigration Table	Conservative faith and values-based cover

Expected institutional opposition

Organization	**Likely attack**
FAIR	"Amnesty by another name"
NumbersUSA	"Undercuts U.S. wages"
Center for Immigration Studies	"Legalization magnet; enforcement will not materialize"

Outreach sequence

1. Quietly circulate the discussion draft to one Republican and one Democrat in each chamber; ask for redlines, not endorsements.

2. Hold separate technical briefings on the section 103 election, fees, military-service provision, labor standards, and Yellow Health. These are the highest-risk provisions.

3. Seek Department of Homeland Security, Department of Labor, Department of Justice, Department of Defense, and Department of Health and Human Services technical assistance before locking bill text.

4. Secure validators from business, faith, law enforcement, labor, immigration counsel, and trafficking-survivor organizations before public launch.

5. Ask legislative counsel for introduced-bill language, CBO for a score after sponsor request, and GAO for an evaluation framework.

6. Re-map every sponsor and committee target after the November 3, 2026 election; plan the full introduction push for the 120th Congress.

APPENDIX C — Anticipated attacks & responses

"This is amnesty by another name."

Amnesty is a pardon: it asks nothing and grants permanence. This Act is the opposite in both directions. It **asks everything** — come forward, be identified, submit biometrics, pass criminal and security screening, pay the full cost, file taxes, work only for E-Verify employers, renew every three years — and it **grants nothing permanent**: no lawful permanent residence, no conversion to a green card, no path to citizenship, no voting, no federal means-tested benefits, and revocation for fraud or felony. It reaches only people who have already lived here for a decade or more; no one can become eligible by arriving. The population is here and is not leaving; the genuine policy choice is whether these families live in the light — known, screened, and paying — or in the shadows, unknown and exploitable. The only contemplated citizenship route is qualifying honorable military service, subject to Department of Defense accession needs and separate implementing law.

"It will be a magnet for new illegal immigration."

Eligibility is frozen at enactment: continuous presence for at least 10 years **before** the date of enactment. Arrival after the cutoff creates no eligibility, ever, under this Act. The bill pairs registration with Title II anti-smuggling enforcement and Title III border integrity directed at future flows, and it sunsets in five years unless Congress votes to continue it.

"It will undercut American wages."

The draft requires the greater of the applicable minimum wage, the occupational prevailing wage, or the wage paid to similarly situated U.S. workers. Work authorization is portable so a worker can leave an abusive employer. Recruitment fees are prohibited, retaliation triggers remedies and debarment, and the Department of Labor receives enforcement authority. Those safeguards remove the wage advantage of an exploitable off-the-books workforce — which is what actually undercuts American wages today.

"Forcing people to give up asylum is cruel or unlawful."

Registration is voluntary, and the Act does not replace the asylum system. The section 103 election applies only to applicants who themselves elect this track; it must be knowing, written, explained in a language the applicant understands, and revocable for 30 days before final approval. Officers must screen for coercion, trafficking, and facts suggesting a protection claim, and refer those cases. The text expressly preserves withholding of removal, Convention Against Torture protection, and any right that cannot lawfully be waived. Legislative counsel must confirm the final scope before introduction.

"The enforcement promises will never happen."

The draft makes enforcement operational rather than rhetorical: registration enrolls and screens a population that is currently invisible; E-Verify is mandatory; status is conditioned on taxes and clean conduct; program metrics are published quarterly; HSI task forces target smuggling finances; and fee transfers are audited. A five-year sunset forces Congress to review GAO findings, a CBO score, and agency performance before the program can continue.

"Yellow Health is taxpayer-funded healthcare for undocumented immigrants."

Yellow Health is optional and limited to Yellow Card holders. Premiums and participant contributions must cover 100 percent of claims, administration, reserves, risk adjustment, and oversight. Federal appropriations, Medicaid, ACA premium tax credits, cost-sharing reductions, and other federal means-tested subsidies are prohibited. Accounts are segregated and audited, the United States does not guarantee losses, and the entire title is severable so it cannot sink the core bill.

Message discipline

- Say "temporary, conditional status for long-term residents," not "legalization" or "pathway."
- Say "come forward, register, get screened, pay, and work in the open," not "apply from abroad" — the abroad channel is a future phase, not this Act.
- Say "people who have lived here for decades," not "newcomers" or "new arrivals."
- Say "smuggling revenues," not "cartel profits," unless a source measures profit.
- Say "CBP enforcement encounters," not "unique illegal crossings."
- Say "estimated" or "projected" for modeled economic figures; never call them a CBO score.
- Lead with the paired deal: accountability for those already here plus border integrity plus worker standards. Do not pitch individual provisions in isolation.

FINAL CAUTION: This document is a policy discussion draft, not introduced legislation and not legal advice. Final text requires congressional legislative counsel, constitutional and immigration-law review, agency technical assistance, a formal CBO estimate, and updated committee and sponsor verification.