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We Are Florida Coalition Urges Florida Lawmakers to Pass Welcoming Florida Act

Bill seeks to repeal controversial provisions in 2023's SB 1718 and secure employment, education protections for Florida residents, regardless of immigration status

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — The We Are Florida Coalition, formed by the Florida Immigrant Coalition (FLIC) and the SPLC Action Fund, is urging Florida lawmakers to pass the Welcoming Florida Act ([HB 1527](#), [SB 1598](#)), a comprehensive bill that extends legal and humanitarian protections for asylum seekers, refugees and migrants living in Florida.

The Welcoming Florida Act, introduced this week by House Democratic **Leader Pro Tempore Dotie Joseph (D-Miami)** and **Senator Victor Torres, Jr. (D-Orlando)** offers meaningful policy recommendations, supports language access initiatives, and establishes a statutory framework to analyze relevant trends in immigrant communities throughout the state.

“America was founded on the principle of welcoming immigrants from around the world to come and make a better life for themselves and their families. The Welcoming Florida Act is about protecting dignity and respect, for all individuals, regardless of their current legal status,” **Senator Torres** said. “These migrants are vital to our State and National economy because they fill crucial vacant job openings in agricultural, hospitality, professional and other economic sectors. They also pay taxes that support our local economy, purchase goods and services that support our local businesses and provide revenues to support essential government services and programs for all Floridians.”

“The Welcoming Florida Act reaffirms that immigrants are welcome here and despite xenophobic fearmongering for political gain, families who simply are trying to live the American Dream can do so without fear, which fosters economic prosperity, cultural enrichment, family unity, and humanitarian values,” said **Representative Joseph**.

The bill also offers strict regulations to prevent individuals who are not licensed attorneys or authorized under federal law to assist in immigration cases from practicing immigration law while emphasizing that their services are not considered

the practice of law. In addition to protecting vulnerable people from opportunistic individuals engaged in the unauthorized practice of law, the bill also repeals several state laws that attack our neighbors, friends, and loved ones who are immigrants, including:

- SB 1718's unnecessary and harmful enhancements to Florida's human smuggling statute – enhanced and mandated for Medicaid-receiving healthcare providers to collect and report on immigration status, even though federal dollars cover those costs -
- State laws related to sanctuary policies; obligations involving immigration detainers that undermine federal due process protections and mandate cooperation with federal immigration authorities; and detaining individuals without due consideration of costs borne by state and local law enforcement agencies

Other provisions of the bill establish a child's fundamental right to access public schools, regardless of their background; reinstate the I-9 employment eligibility verification process for new employees, which provides relief to our businesses struggling with workforce deficiencies; and clarify immigration status alone cannot prevent someone from practicing law or acquiring a professional or occupational license.

“The Welcoming Act is not just about rectifying past injustices; it's a proactive step towards a more equitable and prosperous Florida. It embodies the values of respect, dignity, and collaboration essential for a thriving society,” said **David Metellus, Director of Policy and Politics for the Florida Immigrant Coalition**. “We call on the legislature to seize this moment and embrace a future where every individual, no matter where they are from, contributes to our collective success—a Florida that truly welcomes and empowers all.”

“This bill exemplifies fairness, safety and prosperity – values shared by most Floridians – and makes our state a welcoming place for all,” said **Jonathan Webber, Florida policy director for the SPLC Action**. “Immigration status should not prohibit anyone from accessing education and employment opportunities to feed, clothe and take care of themselves and their families while they are living in the state. We urge all Florida lawmakers to support this bill.”

“An estimated 10 percent of employees in Florida's top industries – including agriculture and construction – are immigrants lacking a documented status,” said **Sadaf Knight, CEO of [Florida Policy Institute](#)**. “The GDP they contribute – \$12.6 billion in a single year – is vital to the state's economy and funding public services from which every Floridian benefits. And regardless of their economic contributions, all Floridians should be recognized for their inherent worth. The Welcoming Act will help do just that.”

