



December 10, 2025

**The Honorable John Thune**

Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
United States Senate SD-511  
Washington, DC 20510

**The Honorable Chuck Schumer**

Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
322 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

**The Honorable Mike Johnson**

Speaker of the House  
U.S. House of Representatives  
568 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

**The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries**

Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2267 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressional Leaders:

We the undersigned independent restaurant and bar owners, and the communities who depend on them, write to urge you to stand with America's independent hospitality businesses and act on comprehensive, pro-growth immigration reform that reflects the realities of our industry and safeguards the livelihoods of workers at every skill level. We do not want special treatment. We're asking for modern, fair, and efficient immigration policies that reflect the reality of our workforce and protect one of the most essential small business sectors in America.

Independent restaurants and bars are powerful economic engines and cultural anchors in every community across the country. Together, they generate more than \$1.37 trillion in direct economic output, support \$3.5 trillion in overall GDP, and employ more people than nearly any other sector. Our industry sustains millions of small farms, vineyards, breweries, and local suppliers, and serves as a critical pathway for entrepreneurship and upward mobility.

Despite that impact, restaurants operate on razor-thin margins and face growing challenges finding and retaining staff. The problem isn't a shortage of willing workers — it's a shortage of accessible, lawful, and practical immigration pathways for the people who already power our kitchens and dining rooms. Outdated visa systems and slow federal processing times make it harder for small businesses to stay open, serve their communities, and contribute to the nation's economic vitality.

Independent restaurants depend upon lawful, reliable avenues to hire and retain the people who make their businesses possible. Yet the existing framework for work authorization and employment-based visas has not kept pace with the needs of today's workforce or small business economy. Workers pursuing legal employment in restaurants often wait more than a year for work permit approvals — leaving employers short-staffed, and employees in limbo. Visa categories were largely designed decades ago with corporations and seasonal industries in mind, not the year-round demands of restaurants that anchor local communities. The H-1B program prioritizes degree-holders, while the H-2B cap and seasonal limits restrict access for small operators seeking consistent, lawful employment options.

Permanent employment-based visas face significant backlogs, and restaurant positions are frequently classified in ways that do not reflect the skill and experience that these jobs require. The high costs of sponsorship — often exceeding \$10,000 per employee — create barriers that large chains can absorb but independent restaurants cannot.



Finally, shifting enforcement priorities from one administration to the next creates ongoing uncertainty. Small business owners need clear, predictable rules to plan, invest, and grow within the law. Our recommendations for meaningful reform are:

- **Recognize food and hospitality professionals as skilled workers.** Culinary and service careers demand expertise, precision, and leadership developed through years of hands-on experience and industry certification, not only formal academic degrees. Reclassifying these roles as skilled occupations would reflect the true nature of the work, open visa pathways that currently exclude most hospitality professionals, and help stabilize a vital sector of the American workforce.
- **Establish practical, lawful hiring pathways for small independent restaurants.** Current visa programs were designed for large corporations and seasonal industries, not for year-round, community-based small businesses. Updating employment-based visas to include small-business carve-outs, reduced fees, and streamlined compliance would make them accessible to independent operators. Renewable, multi-year visas and in-country renewal options would allow restaurants to retain experienced employees and continue contributing to local economies through steady payroll and tax payments.
- **Provide consistent and predictable enforcement of immigration laws.** Independent restaurants rely on stability to plan, hire, and invest in their teams. Constantly shifting enforcement priorities between administrations creates fear and uncertainty for both employers and employees. Clear, consistent rules applied evenly across the country would allow small businesses to focus on compliance, growth, and job creation, rather than survival from one policy cycle to the next.

Independent restaurants are more than places to eat — they are centers of culture, community, and economic opportunity. When these businesses thrive, they sustain local farmers, bakers, brewers, and suppliers, while keeping main streets vibrant and creating millions of jobs nationwide. Yet staying open has never been more difficult. Sensible immigration reform would allow restaurants to hire and retain talented team members, reduce costly turnover, and invest in training and career advancement that strengthen the broader American workforce.

Legislation that reflects the realities of modern restaurant work would keep independent businesses competitive, enable owners to invest in their teams, and empower workers to build stable, long-term careers. Strengthening this sector means strengthening every community it touches, from the farm to the table, from rural towns to city neighborhoods across the country.

Sincerely,

Aaron Bradshaw  
Aaron Teitelbaum  
Abby Duquaine  
Abigail Eccles  
Abigail Allen  
Adam Orman  
Adrian Goffinet

Alain Roussel  
Alex Morales  
Alexa Catanzarite  
Alexander Duran  
Alexander Leo-Guerra  
Alexandra Chiappetta  
Alyson Podesta

Amanda Gunderson  
Amanda Michael  
Amy Lefenfeld  
Amy Roper  
Anastasia Fugit  
Anayeri Anayeri Gomez  
Andrea Borgen Abdallah

Andrew Kastanas  
Andrew Niemeyer  
Andrew Zimmern  
Anett Tarango  
Angela Zion  
Angelica Calderon  
Angelina Santana



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Anne MacKissock	Carol Kurian	Dan Malin	Eloy Garcia
Anson Fernandes	Caroline Styne	Dan Olk	Emily DiMaggio
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Brigid Welchans	Connor Rechsteiner	Doug Shaffer	Ileana C Diaz
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Brittney O'Connor	Corinne Salko	Dylan Heath	Irene Li
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Cam Albrecht	Cristi Midrano	Edie Winters	J Kesh
Cameron Beall	Cyndi Bridges	Elisabeth Smith	Jackie Orduna
Carey Goldstein	Cyndi Smith	Elise Pecor	Jacquelyn Christensen
Cari Rantala	d'Anne MacNeil	Eliza Banchetti	Jade Huynh



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Johny Lema	Kimberly Sherid	Mark Hagen	Nate Adler
Jon Seelbinder	Kirk Matthews	Mark Harris	Nick Pecis
Jorl Rinta	Krista Stearns	Mark Smith	Nick Vivian

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