

May 31, 2024

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Re: Executive authority to authorize parole-in-place for spouses of U.S. citizens

Dear President Biden,

As law professors and scholars,¹ we write to express our position on the scope of executive branch legal authority to grant parole in place (PIP) for the undocumented spouses² of U.S. citizens who are present in the United States, who entered without inspection, and whom the executive branch determines otherwise deserve parole status. We do not take a position on what steps the administration should take.³ Rather, we offer our view of the executive branch's statutory authority to grant PIP.

Section 212(d)(5)(A) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) identifies specific requirements for when the executive branch can grant parole. It states:

The Attorney General may, except as provided in subparagraph (B) or in section 1184(f) of this title, in his discretion parole into the United States temporarily under such conditions as he may prescribe only on a case-by-case basis for urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit any alien applying for admission to the United States[.]⁴

This provision thus grants the executive branch discretion to grant parole to a noncitizen as long as four requirements are met. First, the noncitizen must be “applying for admission.” Second, the grant of parole must be “temporary.” Third, the grant of parole must be “on a case-by-case basis.” And fourth, the parole must be granted for “urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit.” Identifying undocumented spouses of U.S. citizens as generally eligible for PIP if they entered without inspection and are otherwise found to deserve parole status meets each of these criteria.

First, undocumented noncitizens who are present in the United States and entered without inspection are “applying for admission.” The INA itself makes this clear: “An alien present in

¹ All institutional affiliations are for identification purposes only and do not signify institutional endorsement of this letter.

² Though this letter focuses on spouses, the same reasoning would apply to other “immediate relatives” as defined in INA § 201(b)(2)(A)(i), 8 U.S.C. § 1151(b)(2)(A)(i).

³ The USCIS Policy Manual on PIP recognizes broad authority and provides an example (military PIP). <https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-7-part-b-chapter-2> (Section A. subsection 3). USCIS could choose to add spouses of U.S. citizens as another example of when discretion could be recognized.

⁴ INA § 212(d)(5)(A), 8 U.S.C. § 1182(d)(5)(A).

the United States who has not been admitted . . . shall be deemed for purposes of this Act an applicant for admission.”⁵

Second, the grant of PIP would be “temporary,” since the grant of parole is time limited, with the possibility that the noncitizen could reapply at the end of that period. That is how USCIS structured the parole program for nationals of Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela (CHNV parole program).⁶

The grant of PIP would also be “temporary” because most undocumented spouses of U.S. citizens could, if granted parole, apply for adjustment of status to become lawful permanent residents.⁷ In the context of humanitarian parole for individuals outside the United States, USCIS has identified the “means to obtain lawful immigration status during the parole authorization period” as a positive factor in deciding whether to grant parole, presumably because the ability to obtain such status would make the parole period “temporary.”⁸ That same reasoning would apply to the grant of PIP to an undocumented spouse of a U.S. citizen.

Third, the grant of PIP would be “on a case-by-case basis.” That case-by-case requirement would likely prohibit a categorical rule granting PIP to every undocumented spouse of a U.S. citizen who entered the United States without inspection. But it should not prohibit the executive from identifying, as a factor that weighs in favor of a grant of PIP, the fact that a noncitizen is present in the United States and is the spouse of a U.S. citizen. Of course, the executive could still deny PIP to any spouse of a U.S. citizen based on other discretionary factors such as insufficient time living in the United States.

USCIS regularly identifies factors that weigh in favor of a grant of parole without violating the case-by-case requirement. For instance, USCIS has identified as a factor that “ordinarily weighs heavily in favor of parole in place” the fact that a noncitizen is “a spouse, parent, son, or daughter of an Active Duty member of the U.S. Armed Forces, an individual in the Selected Reserve of the Ready Reserve, or an individual who previously served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces or the Selected Reserve of the Ready Reserve.”⁹ Identifying such factors that weigh in favor of a grant of parole does not violate the case-by-case requirement, but simply provides guidance to ensure that the exercise of the discretionary power to grant parole is carried out in a consistent and uniform manner. Indeed, as DOJ recently argued in defending the CHNV parole program, the executive is free to “use . . .

⁵ INA § 235(a)(1), 8 U.S.C. § 1225(a)(1).

⁶ Process for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans, <https://www.uscis.gov/CHNV> (describing a “temporary period of parole for up to two years”).

⁷ INA § 245(a), (c), 8 U.S.C. § 1255(a), (c).

⁸ USCIS, Humanitarian or Significant Public Benefit Parole for Individuals Outside the United States, https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/humanitarian_parole.

⁹ USCIS Adjudicator’s Field Manual Chapter 21.1(c)(1), <https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/policy-manual-afm/afm21-external.pdf>; see also USCIS Policy Manual Vol. 7, Part B, Ch. 2, § A.3, <https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-7-part-b-chapter-2>.

parole for groups of individuals subject to the same qualifying ‘urgent humanitarian reasons’ and ‘significant public benefit.’”¹⁰

Fourth, treating an immediate-family relationship with a U.S. citizen as a positive factor in deciding whether to grant PIP would be consistent with the “urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit” requirement. The statute provides no definition of either term, which inherently gives the executive branch significant discretion in deciding what qualifies as an “urgent humanitarian reason[]” or “significant public benefit.” Indeed, DOJ recently explained that the executive’s “interpretation and application of those terms are . . . entitled to deference” specifically because the INA does not define those terms or impose numerical limits on the number of parolees and because the statute makes the executive branch “responsible for ...[e]stablishing and administering rules ... governing ... parole.”¹¹ Thus, as DOJ put it, “[s]ection 1182(d)(5)(A) sets no limit on how widespread an urgent humanitarian reason or significant public benefit may be as long as the agency determines it applies in an individual case.”¹²

Avoiding the separation of U.S. citizen families through the removal of spouses of U.S. citizens falls within both statutory terms. Our immigration laws have long focused on “unit[ing] families and preserv[ing] family ties,”¹³ so keeping U.S. citizen families together can certainly be understood as an “urgent humanitarian reason.” And granting PIP to deserving spouses of U.S. citizens would also provide a “significant public benefit” given their contributions to our communities and our economy and the harm their removal would cause to their U.S. citizen family members.¹⁴ Family unity has been a relevant factor for a variety of parole programs that have not been challenged in court - Cuban¹⁵ and Haitian¹⁶ Family Reunification, the general Family Reunification Parole program that now includes Ecuador,¹⁷ and the Afghan Humanitarian Parole guidance.¹⁸ And the challenge to the family-based Central American Minors (CAM) program was filed over two years ago, and that program has not been enjoined.¹⁹

¹⁰ Defendants’ Post-Trial Brief at 41 (quoting 6 U.S.C. § 202(4)), *Texas v. United States*, S.D. Tex. No. 23-cv-00007, ECF No. 284 (Sept. 29, 2023) (“*Texas Post-Trial Brief*”); see also Defendants’ Proposed Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law at 45, *Texas v. United States*, S.D. Tex. No. 23-cv-00007, ECF No. 240 (Aug. 16, 2023) (“*Texas Findings*”) (“Congress left open the possibility that urgent humanitarian reasons and significant public benefits under Section 1182(d)(5)(A) might be presented by many similarly situated noncitizens, and that the Executive could consider the aggregate benefits of paroling noncitizens because they fall within certain groups.”).

¹¹ *Texas Post-Trial Brief* at 39 (quoting 6 U.S.C. § 202(4)).

¹² *Texas Findings* at 45.

¹³ *INS v. Errico*, 385 U.S. 214, 220 (1966).

¹⁴ See, e.g., Miguel Pinedo & Carmen R. Valdez, Immigration enforcement policies and the mental health of U.S. citizens: findings from a comparative analysis, *Am. J. Community Psychol.* 2020 Sep; 66(1-2): 119–129.

¹⁵ <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/humanitarian-parole/the-cuban-family-reunification-parole-program>.

¹⁶ <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/humanitarian-parole/the-haitian-family-reunification-parole-hfrp-program>.

¹⁷ <https://www.uscis.gov/FRP>.

¹⁸ <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/humanitarian-parole/information-for-afghan-nationals-on-requests-to-uscis-for-parole>.

¹⁹ *Texas v. Biden*, 3:22-cv-780 (N.D. Tex. 2022).

Historically, the parole power has been used widely, and multiple efforts to limit the scope of parole authority in the negotiations over the Refugee Act of 1980 failed. Congress kept the parole authority as an important tool in addition to the refugee program.²⁰

In conclusion, we believe the Biden administration has legal authority to grant PIP for the undocumented spouses of U.S. citizens who are present in the United States, who entered without inspection, and who the executive branch determines otherwise are eligible for parole status.

Respectfully yours,



Stephen Yale-Loehr
Professor of Immigration Law Practice
Cornell Law School
Faculty Director, Cornell Immigration Law and Policy Program



David Zimmer
Lecturer on Law
Harvard Law School

cc: White House Counsel Siskel
Attorney General Garland
Secretary of Homeland Security Mayorkas

Ana Pottratz Acosta
Professor of Law
Mitchell Hamline School of Law

Ahilan Arulanantham
Professor from Practice
UCLA School of Law

Raquel E. Aldana
Professor of Law
UC Davis

Sameer M. Ashar
Clinical Professor of Law
University of California, Irvine

T. Alexander Aleinikoff
Dean of the New School for Social
Research
Director of the Zolberg Institute on
Migration and Mobility

Angela M. Banks
Charles J. Merriam Distinguished
Professor of Law
Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law
Arizona State University

Carolina Antonini
Adjunct Professor of Law
Georgia State University, College of
Law

Erin M. Barbato
Clinical Professor
University of Wisconsin Law School

Sabrineh Ardalan
Clinical Professor
Harvard Law School

Linda Barreto, Esq
Director, New American Legal Clinic &
Professor of Law
San Joaquin College of Law

²⁰ Deborah Anker & Michael Posner, *The Forty Year Crisis: A Legislative History of the Refugee Act of 1980*, 19 San Diego L. Rev. 1 (1981), <https://digital.sandiego.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1735&context=sdlr>.

Jon Bauer
Clinical Professor of Law and Richard D.
Tulisano '69 Scholar in Human Rights
University of Connecticut School of Law

Lenni B. Benson
Distinguish Chair Immigration and Human
Rights Law
New York Law School

Dan Berger
Visiting Scholar
Cornell Law School

Jacqueline Bhabha
Professor of the Practice of Health and
Human Rights
Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health

Matthew Boaz
Acting Director, Immigrant Rights Clinic
Washington & Lee School of Law

Richard A. Boswell
Professor of Law
University of California College of Law,
San Francisco

Emily Brown
Visiting Assistant Clinical Professor of Law
The Ohio State University Moritz College
of Law

Victoria Carmona
Associate Clinical Professor of Law
Chicago-Kent College of Law

R. Linus Chan
Professor of Clinical Law
University of Minnesota

Stacy Cozart Martin
Adjunct Professor/Partner
CWRU School of Law

Sara P. Cressey
Visiting Professor, Refugee and Human
Rights Clinic
University of Maine School of Law

Evelyn H Cruz
Clinical Law Professor
Sandra Day O'Connor, ASU

Rose Cuison-Villazor
Professor of Law and Chancellor's
Social Justice Scholar
Rutgers Law School

Paula Joan Duthouy
Clinical Professor
Mitchell Hamline School of Law

Bram Elias
Clinical Professor of Law University of
Iowa College of Law

Ilana Etkin Greenstein
Adjunct Faculty
Northeastern University School of Law

Jill E. Family
Professor of Law
Widener Law Commonwealth

Daniel Farbman
Associate Professor
Boston College Law School

Betsy L. Fisher
Lecturer
University of Michigan Law School

Niels W. Frenzen
Sidney M. and Audrey M. Irmes
Endowed Clinical Professor of Law
University of Southern California Gould
School of Law

Kathleen Gasparian
Adjunct Professor of Law
Loyola University New Orleans

Denise Gilman
Co-Director, Immigration Clinic
University of Texas School of Law

Jonathan Grode
Adjunct Professor of Immigration Law
Temple Beasley School of Law

Prof. Paul Grussendorf (retired)
Associated Professor of Clinical Law
George Washington University Law School

Hemanth C. Gundavaram
Clinical Professor, Immigrant Justice Clinic
Northeastern University School of Law

Linda Hamilton
Clinical Adjunct Professor of Law
University of Pittsburgh School of Law

Lindsay M. Harris
Professor of Law
Director, International Human Rights Clinic
University of San Francisco School of Law

Katie Herbert Meyer
Professor of Practice
Washington University in St. Louis School
of Law

Marielena Hincapié Distinguished
Immigration Fellow Visiting Scholar
Cornell Law School

Laila L. Hlass
Clinical Professor of Law
Tulane Law School

Mary Holper
Clinical Professor
Boston College Law School

Kit Johnson
Hugh Roff Professor of Law
Thomas P. Hester Presidential Professor
The University of Oklahoma College of Law

Elizabeth Jordan
Visiting Assistant Professor and Director
Immigration Law and Policy Clinic
University of Denver Sturm College of Law

Sital Kalantry
Professor of Law and Associate Dean
Seattle University School of Law

Charles Kamasaki
Distinguished Immigration Scholar
Cornell Law School

Daniel Kanstroom
Professor of Law
Boston College

Jaclyn Kelley-Widmer
Clinical Professor of Law
Cornell Law School

Mahsa Khanbabai
Adjunct Faculty
Stonehill College

Karl Klare
George J. & Kathleen Waters
Matthews Distinguished University
Professor
Northeastern University School of
Law

Megan Kludt
Adjunct Professor of Law
Western New England School of Law

Charles H. Kuck
Adjunct Professor of Law
Emory Law School

Eunice Lee
Associate Professor of Law
Loyola University New Orleans

Beth Lyon
Clinical Professor of Law
Cornell Law School

Lynn Marcus
Clinical Law Professor
University of Arizona James E.
Rogers College of Law

Fatma Marouf
Professor of Law
Texas A&M School of Law

Estelle McKee
Clinical Professor of Law
Cornell Law School

M. Isabel Medina
Ferris Distinguished Professor of Law
Loyola University New Orleans
College of Law

Eugenio Mollo, Jr.
Clinical Assistant Professor of Law
The University of Toledo College of
Law

Hiroshi Motomura
Susan Westerberg Prager
Distinguished Professor of Law
Faculty Co-Director, Center for
Immigration Law and Policy
School of Law, University of
California, Los Angeles (UCLA)

Elora Mukherjee
Jerome L. Greene Clinical Professor
of Law & Director, Immigrants' Rights
Clinic
Columbia Law School

Karen Musalo
Professor
University of California, College of the
Law, San Francisco

Bill Ong Hing
Professor of Law and Migration
Studies
University of San Francisco

Reena Parikh
Assistant Clinical Professor
Boston College Law School

Stephen Poellot
Visiting Clinical Lecturer in Law
Yale Law School

Jaya Ramji-Nogales
Professor of Law
Temple Law School

Aziz Rana
Incoming J. Donald Monan, S.J.,
University Professor of Law and
Government
Boston College

Katherine A. Reynolds
Director, Humanitarian Immigration Law
Clinic
Elon Law

Krystal Ann Rodriguez-Campos
Assistant Professor
University of La Verne College of Law
and Public Service

Carrie Rosenbaum
Assistant Professor
Fowler School of Law
Chapman University

Cynthia B. Rosenberg
Adjunct Professor, Legal Studies
Stevenson University

Rachel Rosenbloom
Professor of Law
Northeastern University School of Law

Michelle Saenz-Rodriguez
Adjunct Law Professor
Southern Methodist Law School

Leticia Saucedo
Professor of Law
UC Davis School of Law

Faiza Sayed
Assistant Professor of Law
Brooklyn Law School

Bijal Shah
Associate Professor of Law
Boston College Law School

Ragini Shah
Clinical Professor of Law
Suffolk University Law School

Erica Schair-Cardona
Outreach and Advocacy Attorney
University of Maine School of Law

Anne Schaufele
Assistant Professor of Law & Co-
Director, Immigration and Human
Rights Clinic
UDC David A. Clarke School of Law

Sarah Sherman-Stokes
Clinical Associate Professor
Boston University School of Law

Andrew Schoenholtz
Professor from Practice
Georgetown University Law Center

Erica B. Schommer
Clinical Professor of Law
St. Mary's University School of Law

Anita Sinha
Professor of Law & Director,
International Human Rights Law
Clinic American University
Washington College of Law

Jayashri Srikantiah
Professor of Law & Director,
Immigrants' Rights Clinic
Stanford Law School

Elissa Steglich
Clinical Professor and Co-Director,
Immigration Clinic
University of Texas School of Law

Margaret D. Stock
MacArthur Foundation Fellow, Class
of 2013

Maureen A Sweeney
Law School Professor
University of Maryland Carey Law School

Margaret H. Taylor
Professor of Law
Wake Forest University School of Law

Logan Tennerelli
Dean of Students
San Joaquin College of Law

Claire R. Thomas
Assistant Professor of Law and Director,
Asylum Clinic
New York Law School

David B. Thronson
Alan S. Zekelman Professor of
International Human Rights Law Michigan
State University College of Law

Veronica T. Thronson
Clinical Professor of Law
Michigan State University College of Law

Emily Torstveit Ngara
Associate Clinical Professor and Director,
Immigration Clinic
Georgia State University College of Law

Enid Trucios-Haynes
Professor of Law and Bernard Flexner
Chair
Louis D. Brandeis School of Law,
University of Louisville

Paulina Vera
Professorial Lecturer in Law
The George Washington University Law
School

Alexander Vernon
Assistant Professor
Director Immigration Law Clinic University
of Detroit Mercy School of Law

Katharine K. Walts
Director
Clinical Professor of Law
Loyola University Chicago School of Law

Jonathan Weinberg
Distinguished Professor
Professor of Law
Wayne State University Law School

Anna R. Welch
Professor
University of Maine School of Law

Lucy Williams
Professor of Law
Northeastern School of Law

Michael J. Wishnie
William O. Douglas Clinical
Yale Law School