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**NATIONAL COALITION OF YOUTH, LAWYERS & CHILD WELFARE EXPERTS CALL ON TOP IMMIGRATION OFFICIALS TO PROTECT YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK OF DEPORTATION DESPITE BEING ELIGIBLE TO APPLY FOR GREEN CARDS**

***Backlog for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status green cards leaves thousands of children in legal limbo for years***

**New York, NY — May 20, 2021** — Today a group of over 400 professionals with expertise working with immigrant children who have survived abuse and neglect, sent an open letter to top immigration officials calling on them to immediately address the harms caused by the years-long Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) wait to apply for lawful permanent residence. This backlog has left tens of thousands of vulnerable children and youth stuck in legal limbo and facing potential deportation — despite being eligible to apply for green cards.

The effort is led by the [End SIJS Backlog Coalition](#) (“the Coalition”), a national group of directly impacted immigrant youth and over 55 allied organizations working to educate Congress, immigration agencies, and the public about the harmful impacts of visa caps on immigrant children, and to advocate for an end to the SIJS backlog. In addition to the Coalition’s partner organizations, hundreds of lawyers, doctors, social workers, and activists have signed on to the letter. Among the letter’s organizational signatories are: Kids in Need of Defense, Mid-South Immigration Advocates, World Relief, Immigrant and Refugee Services of Catholic Charities New York, Doctors for Camp Closure and the Alliance for Children’s Rights.

SIJS is an immigration status that allows children who have survived parental abuse, neglect, or abandonment to apply for permanent residency in the United States. It combines special protections of both state child welfare law and humanitarian immigration law to help survivors of trauma attain protection with as little delay as possible. Congress created SIJS—with its direct pathway to a green card—to provide young people with tools to achieve stability: eligibility for federal financial aid for college, work authorization, and protection from deportation. A SIJS petition must be adjudicated within 180 days, and but for the backlog, a young person granted SIJS is eligible to immediately apply for a green card. However, the wait for SIJS-based green cards now prevents many young people from accessing those tools in a timely and meaningful way.

Tens of thousands of SIJS beneficiaries from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras now face waits of multiple years before they can apply for lawful permanent residence due to annual employment-based visa limits and per-country caps on green cards, exposing them to exploitation and deportation, the exact perils SIJS was enacted to prevent. “It took me around four years to get my green card. During that time, I was not able to access financial aid for college or a work permit – I was prevented from pursuing my dreams,” states Ivonne S., a Coalition youth leader.

In the letter, the Coalition outlines the harms young people experience as a result of the backlog and calls on the administration to implement stop-gap measures, like granting SIJS applicants work permits and preventing their deportation, until legislation to eliminate the backlog is passed.

“Because of the visa backlog,” states Rachel Davidson, Coalition steering committee member and attorney at The Door, “children and youth – who have already been approved by the government for protection and a pathway to lawful permanent residence – live in constant fear of being detained and deported. This is a

moral and bureaucratic failure. We urge the Biden administration to create policies guided by Congress' desire to provide permanent protections for SIJS youth.”

The full letter, including the complete list of proposed government actions, is available online [here](#). More information about the SIJS backlog and the End SIJS Backlog Coalition can be found [here](#).

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