



For Immediate Release

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New Study Shows Ballooning SIJS Backlog, Urgent Need to Pass Protect Vulnerable Immigrant Youth Act

Washington, DC—Today [*The Double Exclusion of Immigrant Youth*](#), a new study on Special Immigrant Juveniles Status (SIJS), was published in the Social Science Research Network (SSRN). The study represents the first systematic study of children seeking SIJS and SIJS-based Lawful Permanent Residence and was authored by Rachel L. Davidson, Director of the End SIJS Backlog Coalition, a project of the National Immigration Project; Laila Hlass, Clinical Professor of Law & Co-Director of the Immigrant Rights Clinic at Tulane University; and Austin Kocher, Research Assistant Professor at Syracuse University Newhouse School of Public Communications.

SIJS is a congressionally created humanitarian protection designed to quickly provide permanent legal protections to immigrant children who have been abused, abandoned, or neglected by their parents. In recent years, about 20,000 children per year have applied for SIJS, but face steep systemic challenges in timely accessing the stability and protection it promises.

This new study looks at 10 years of SIJS petitions and corresponding applications for Lawful Permanent Residence and makes critical findings about the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services' (USCIS) routine failure to decide on SIJS petitions in the statutory limit of 180 days, the harmful effects of the skyrocketing SIJS backlog, and more. The study also makes recommendations for improved access to justice for children seeking SIJS, including the recommendation for Congress to fix the SIJS backlog, caused by the miscategorization of SIJS as an employment visa despite its humanitarian intent. The Protect Vulnerable Immigrant Youth Act, which was [introduced](#) in the House and Senate earlier this year, would address this technical oversight and allow SIJS youth to achieve much needed permanency in the United States.

“Our research shows what can happen to a program that was designed to protect children when adequate safeguards are not in place,” said **Rachel L. Davidson, Director of the End SIJS Backlog Coalition, a project of the National Immigration Project**. “One of the biggest challenges of the program, the SIJS backlog, is due to a technical oversight that has trapped thousands of children in a system that is at best inefficient, and at worst, has at times become part of a political agenda to deny immigrant children protection. Let’s be clear: the Protect Vulnerable Immigrant Youth Act is not revolutionary, it is curative. Congress must act now to pass this critical piece of legislation that would at last remedy a technical error that has left children in a dangerous legal limbo in the immigration system for years.”

“After analyzing more than 150,000 government records, the results are clear: systemic barriers have prevented the SIJS program from fulfilling its purpose of protecting children,” said **Laila L. Hlass, Clinical Professor of Law & Co-Director of the Immigrant Rights Clinic and Tulane University**. “We urge Congress to act swiftly to pass the Protect Vulnerable Immigrant Youth Act, which would finally address the backlog that has trapped tens of thousands of children in a legal limbo.”

“One of the most important lessons from this paper is that it shows the value of open records requests and litigation for scholarly research and advocacy,” said **Austin Kocher, Research Assistant Professor at Syracuse University Newhouse School of Public Communications**. “Without the hard work of attorneys using Freedom of Information Act requests and litigation, we would not understand with this level of detail precisely how migrant youth are further harmed by the immigration system and how to address it with better policy. Government transparency and academic research can and should go hand-in-hand.”

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