



## STATEMENT

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# A BOLD, CREATIVE STEP IN KANSAS

ImmigrationWorks' Kansas affiliate, the Kansas Business Coalition, has crafted legislation introduced in the state legislature this week that would allow unauthorized workers living in Kansas to remain in the country and work legally.

The program would match unauthorized workers with employers in sectors that the state determines are experiencing labor shortages, and the state would support participating workers' requests for federal work authorization. Federal approval would be required for immigrants to work in the U.S.

"ImmigrationWorks applauds the creative thinking behind the Kansas Business Coalition's proposal," said IW president Tamar Jacoby. "This is an important contribution to the immigration debate."

Even in a weak business climate, the sectors that form the backbone of the Kansas economy struggle to find workers. Unemployment in some counties in the western part of the state hovers below 3 percent, and many dairies and livestock feed lots report persistent trouble filling jobs. Programs to supply U.S. businesses with legal foreign workers are so bureaucratic and bound up in red tape that they are virtually unusable. Yet many of the 45,000 unauthorized immigrants in Kansas are eager to work in dairies and feed lots. "The proposed program does the logical thing," said Jacoby, "the only thing that makes sense for the Kansas economy. It matches these willing foreign workers with willing Kansas employers."

"The million dollar question," Jacoby said, "is how the federal government will respond." The immigration service has said it lacks the resources to deport all the unauthorized workers living in the U.S. Its declared policy is to prioritize those with serious criminal records. Both the Kansas proposal and a similar statute enacted last year in Utah bar participation by foreigners with serious criminal records. Yet the federal government has said it will sue if Utah moves to launch its guest worker program. "This makes no sense," Jacoby said. "Why give unauthorized workers permission to remain in the U.S. but block thoughtful, well-crafted programs that would allow them to work legally?"

ImmigrationWorks congratulates the Kansas Business Coalition for its leadership and pragmatic problem solving. In Kansas as in other states, IW works with local business coalitions to develop model legislation. "We're grateful to ImmigrationWorks for its counsel and support," said Allie Devine, a business representative who helped craft the Kansas proposal, "for sharing its knowledge of immigration policy and national immigration politics."

"We're pleased to stand by the Kansas Business Coalition as it makes its case to voters," said IW president Jacoby. "This is just the sort of experimentation we need in the states – the laboratories of democracy. The Kansas proposal would be good for Kansas, and it's good for the national immigration debate – a badly needed reminder of an unsolved problem that's going to reassert itself with a vengeance as the nation's economy recovers."

**IW USA president Tamar Jacoby can be reached for comment at  
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*ImmigrationWorks USA is a national federation of business owners advocating immigration reform. The organization links major corporations, trade associations and 25 state-based coalitions of small to medium-sized employers working to advance better immigration law. Their shared aim: legislation that brings America's annual legal intake of foreign workers more realistically into line with the country's labor needs.*