



**Washington Community Action Network**  
(formerly Washington Citizen Action)  
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## **COMMON MYTHS ABOUT IMMIGRATION**

Immigration is an American experience. Yet because of our broken immigration system, every day thousands of people are denied basic civil and human rights, are separated from their families, and are exploited in the workplace.

Washington CAN! believes that a just immigration system should provide a path to citizenship, protect all workers, reunite families and ensure equal access to justice. Immigration reform is a core racial and economic justice issue. Washington CAN! fights for these principles at the local, state, and national levels.

The following myths have created doubts and questions in the minds of many people in America. Please take a moment to read these and help us get the truth out there!

***Myth: Undocumented immigrants do not want to be legal residents.<sup>i</sup>***

**FACT:** Immigrants come to the U.S. for a variety of reasons – to reunite with family or to find better employment opportunities - and would prefer to do so through legal channels. However, the U.S. immigration system is extremely limited, and undocumented immigrants in the U.S. cannot simply apply for a visa and obtain legal status.

***Myth: Undocumented immigrants take jobs from Americans.***

**FACT:** Because many employers provide substandard wages and benefits particularly to immigrant workers, there are many jobs filled by immigrant labor that an older, more educated American workforce is not willing to fill.<sup>ii</sup> There is substantial evidence that the presence of immigrants in the labor force creates jobs and strengthens local economies.

***Myth: Undocumented immigrants do not pay taxes.***

**FACT:** Undocumented immigrants pay taxes in a number of ways, including income and sales tax.

All immigrants, regardless of status, will pay on average \$80,000 more per capita more in taxes than they use in government services over their lifetime.<sup>iii</sup> The Social Security Administration reports that it holds approximately \$420 billion from the earnings of immigrants who are not in a position to claim benefits.<sup>iv</sup>

***Myth: Undocumented immigrants drain the welfare system.***

**FACT:** Undocumented immigrants are ineligible for the vast majority of state and federal benefits and are only eligible for those that are considered important to public health and safety. In fact many legal immigrants are also ineligible for most federal benefits.





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***Myth: Undocumented immigrants are more likely to be criminals.***

**FACT:** Numerous studies by independent researchers and government commissions over the past 100 years repeatedly and consistently have found that, in fact, immigrants are *less* likely to commit crimes or to be behind bars than are the native-born. This is true for the nation as a whole, as well as for cities with large immigrant populations such as Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, and Miami, and cities along the U.S.-Mexico border such as San Diego and El Paso.<sup>v</sup>

***Myth: The best way to stop undocumented immigration is by increasing enforcement.***

**Fact:** Between 1986 and 2002 the number of border enforcement agents has tripled, the number of hours they spent patrolling the border grew by a factor of approximately eight, and the Border Patrol's budget has increased tenfold. At the same time, the number of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. has continued to increase.<sup>vi</sup> Support is growing for a more comprehensive approach to immigration control which combines smart enforcement with measures to create a legal path for those who come to the U.S. to work, and those who are already in the workforce.

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<sup>i</sup> National Council of La Raza, "Common Myths About Undocumented Immigrants." Fact Sheet 2006.

<sup>ii</sup> Paral, Rob, "Essential Workers: Immigrants are a Needed Supplement to the Native-Born Labor Force." Washington, DC: Immigration Policy Center, March 2005.

<sup>iii</sup> Smith, J.P. and B. Edmonston, *The New Americans: Economic, Demographic, and Fiscal Effects of Immigration*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2005.

<sup>iv</sup> *Testimony on the "ITIN" and Social Security Number Misuse*, presented by Patrick P. O'Carroll, Jr., Social Security Administration, Office of the Inspector General, to the House Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Oversight, Subcommittee on Social Security, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC, March 24, 2004, [www.ssa.gov/oig/communications/testimony\\_speeches/03102004testimony.htm](http://www.ssa.gov/oig/communications/testimony_speeches/03102004testimony.htm).

<sup>v</sup> Rumbaut, Ruben G. & Ewing, Walter A., "The Myth of Immigrant Criminality and the Paradox of Assimilation: Incarceration Rates among Native and Foreign-Born Men." Washington DC: Immigration Policy Center, Spring 2007.

<sup>vi</sup> Massey, Douglas, "Beyond the Border Buildup: Towards a New Approach to Mexico-U.S. Migration." Washington, DC: Immigration Policy Center, September 2005.

