



Melanie Storey, Director of Policy Implementation and Oversight
Federal Student Aid, U.S. Department of Education
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Dear Ms. Storey,

On behalf of the End SIJS Backlog Coalition and the undersigned 139 organizations and academics, we urge you to extend federal student aid eligibility to Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) recipients. SIJS was established by Congress to provide a pathway to lawful permanent status for undocumented children who have suffered parental abuse, abandonment, or neglect. Despite SIJS being a humanitarian status for youth, SIJS green card visas are currently categorized as employment-based visas. This has led to a years-long visa backlog, causing over 100,000 SIJS youth to have to wait years to become lawful permanent residents during a pivotal time in their transition to adulthood and as a result, barring them from federal aid for college under the Department of Education's current policy.

In fact, under the Higher Education Act, students with SIJS are eligible for federal student aid. The Act defines eligible noncitizens as those who are in the United States "for other than a temporary purpose with the intention of becoming a citizen or permanent resident."¹ SIJS youth clearly meet this definition. We request that the Department of Education amend its handbook to reflect SIJS youth's eligibility.

SIJS youth, some of whom are in foster care, are an already vulnerable population of immigrant youth, and they face unique challenges in their pursuit of higher education and opportunity in the United States. The words of Claude, an impacted youth, highlight the ways lack of access to federal student aid impacts the lives of SIJS youth and the urgency of extending access to federal student aid to them:

¹ 20 U.S.C. § 1091(a); 34 C.F.R. § 668.33 (2009).


“I applied to college, I got into college, but I just couldn’t cover my fees anymore so I couldn’t attend the school. It’s been two years and, oh my god, it’s really depressing. I don’t know how I turned 22, I remember I was 19 but I don’t know how I got here. Having nothing accomplished, in a way, for the past 3 years.”

– Claude, from the country of Georgia, living in New York, currently in the SIJS backlog.

It is crucial that the Department of Education ensure SIJS youth have equal access to higher education and the financial assistance necessary to achieve that access.

We stand together in our request that the Department of Education take action in amending the handbook to explicitly include SIJS recipients in federal student aid programs. This important step aligns not only with the Department of Education’s mission statement of “[ensuring equal access to education](#)” but also recognizes the unique circumstances and contributions of SIJS youth.

Sincerely,



Rachel Leya Davidson
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Organizational Signatories

Acacia Center for Justice
Americans for Immigrant Justice
Arkansas Immigrant Defense
Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC
Asylum Clinic Kansas City
Ayuda
Bet Tzedek Legal Services
Border Network for Human Rights
Canal Alliance
Capital Area Immigrants’ Rights (CAIR) Coalition
Center for Children’s Advocacy
Center for Law and Social Policy
Central American Refugee Center (CARECEN NY)
Central American Resource Center - CARECEN of California
Central West Justice Center
Centro Legal de la Raza
Children’s Law Center of Massachusetts

Children's Legal Center
Children's Law Center of California
Chinese Community Center, Houston
Church World Service
Church World Service (Lancaster)
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)
Communities United for Status & Protection (CUSP)
Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto
Comprehensive Youth Development
Connecticut Institute for Refugees and Immigrants
Cornell Asylum & Convention Against Torture Appellate Clinic
De Novo
Diocesan Migrant and Refugee Services, Inc.
DOVE (Domestic Violence Ended), Inc.
East Bay Community Law Center
El Centro Hispanoamericano
Florence Immigrant & Refugee Rights Project
Florida Legal Services, Inc.
Free to Be Youth Project/UJC
Freedom Network USA
FWD.us
Galveston-Houston Immigrant Representation Project
Goshen College
Grassroots Political Power
Harvard Representation Initiative
HIAS Pennsylvania
Hispanic Federation
Human Rights Initiative of North Texas
Immigrant Children Advocates' Relief Effort (ICARE)
Immigrant Defenders Law Center
Immigrant Families Together
Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project
Immigrant Legal Defense
Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC)
Immigrants Rising
Immigration Center for Women and Children
Immigration Hub
ImmSchools
Jewish Family and Community Services of Pittsburgh
Jewish Family Service of San Diego
Just Neighbors Ministry
Justice & Diversity Center of the Bar Association of San Francisco
Justice Center of Southeast Massachusetts
Justice in Motion
Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)
Latin American Legal Defense and Education Fund

Latino Racial Justice Circle Inc.
Legal Aid Society of San Mateo County
Legal Counsel for Youth and Children (LCYC)
Legal Services for Children
Legal Services of New Jersey
Loyola Immigrant Justice Clinic
Luminus Network for New Americans
Lutheran Community Services Northwest
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
Lutheran Social Services of New York
Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area (LSSNCA)
Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition
MetroWest Legal Services
Michigan Immigrant Rights Center
Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid
Mid-South Immigration Advocates
Minkwon Center for Community Action
Mobilization for Justice, Inc.
National Education Association
National Immigrant Justice Center
National Immigration Law Center (NILC)
National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
New Jersey Consortium for Immigrant Children
New Mexico Immigrant Law Center
New York Immigration Coalition
New York Justice For Our Neighbors
Oasis Legal Services
Open Immigration Legal Services
Pathway for Immigrant Workers, Inc.
Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration
Project Lifeline
Public Counsel
Public Law Center
Queens Defenders
RAICES
Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network (RMIAN)
Safe Passage Project
Sanctuary for Families
SB County Immigrant Legal Defense Center
Sojourners
Tahirih Justice Center
The Advocates for Human Rights
The Committee of Interns and Residents (CIR/SEIU)
The Door's Legal Services Center
The Education Trust
The Legal Aid Society

UCLA Immigrant Family Legal Clinic
United We Dream
University of California Immigrant Legal Services Center
University of California San Diego Undocumented Student Services
Urban Justice Center
Volunteers of Legal Service
Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights

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