

State Citizenship Is a National Solution to Immigration Reform

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For too many years our nation's discourse around immigration has been distorted by anti-immigrant activists who have advanced bold but regressive state immigration policies. State laws in Arizona and elsewhere have powerfully, but inaccurately, framed the immigration issue through the lenses of criminality and terrorism. While these laws have not generally fared well in court, their impact on our national perception of immigration has impeded federal immigration reform. Meanwhile, states like New York continue to suffer the consequences of our broken immigration laws. Our families continue to be fractured by a torrent of deportations. Our economic growth continues to be impeded by the barriers our immigrant labor force faces. And our democracy continues to be undermined by the exclusion of a broad class of New York residents.

The New York Is Home Act, recently introduced by New York State Senator Gustavo Rivera and Assembly Member Karim Camara, with support from the Center for Popular Democracy and Make the Road New York, charts a path forward on immigration — a path that like-minded states and ultimately the federal government could follow. The legislation would grant state citizenship to noncitizens who can prove three years of residency and tax payment and who demonstrate a commitment to abiding by state laws and the state constitution.

The bill is an ambitious but sensible assertion of a state's well-established power to define the bounds of its own political community. Unlike the Arizona law, this legislation is carefully crafted to respect the unique province of the federal government. As misguided and brutal as the federal immigration regime is, New York cannot alter

federal deportation policy. However, it is absolutely within New York's power to facilitate the full inclusion of immigrants in our state. By granting state citizenship, we would extend the full bundle of rights a state can deliver — the right to vote in state elections, to drive, to access higher education, among others — and we would define the full range of responsibilities that come along with citizenship, including tax payment, jury service and respect for state law.

By reorienting our national conversation on immigration around the more accurate and productive themes of family, economic vitality and political inclusion, this legislation will move us toward a real solution to our nation's immigration quagmire.

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