

Statement of Jim Williams Jr.
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“The Impacts of Temporary Protected Status”

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Chairman McClintock, Ranking Member Jayapal, and Members of the Subcommittee, my name is Jimmy Williams Jr., and I'm the General President of the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades. I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on the impacts of Temporary Protected Status (TPS).

The International Union of Painters and Allied Trades (IUPAT) is made up of over 140,000 members across the United States and Canada who work largely in the Finishing Trades – including glazing and glass work, industrial coatings, commercial painting, floor covering, wall covering, and drywall finishing. We also represent a smaller percentage of trade show workers and public employees. I have been on the staff of the IUPAT for nearly 24 years and have served as the General President since September 2021. Throughout my career, which began as an apprentice glazier in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, I've seen the valuable contributions immigrant workers make every day on job sites and in our union, as well as the negative effects on the industry when bad employers are allowed to drive immigrant workers into the shadow economy and exploit them with impunity.

My testimony today is focused on the positive impact workers with Temporary Protected Status have had on my union and my industry, as well as the far-reaching harm caused by the aggressive cancellations of TPS and the removal of work authorization for millions of workers in this country.

History of TPS

As you know, Temporary Protected Status was first established by Congress as part of the Immigration Act of 1990 and allows for the administration, currently through the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, to designate certain countries for TPS when several standards are met. The initial designations range from 6 to 18 months.

Over the course of the last 35 years, under both Democrat and Republican administrations, TPS has been both re-designated and extended for many countries. While some argue that TPS was intended to be “temporary,” Congress has never acted to curtail the number of times TPS can be extended nor acted upon a long-term solution for TPS recipients who have lived, worked, and contributed to their communities for decades.

Importance of TPS to our Industry

The IUPAT has been at the forefront of fighting for immigration reform and to protect those with TPS status for decades. Our union was founded by immigrant workers more than 130 years ago, and the construction industry relies, more than most other industries, on an immigrant workforce. In fact, immigrant workers are 3.2

times more likely to work in construction trades than U.S.-born workers.¹ In that context, it's easy to see why TPS, and the stability it provides to workers, is essential to our industry.

Construction and other job sites can be dangerous places where we rely on every worker to take their own safety and their coworkers' safety very seriously. It's essential that workers feel free to speak up about working conditions, and particularly about safety, without fear of retaliation. When immigrant workers feel that the risks are too high to speak up if they do see something, it creates the conditions that we see on too many job sites across the country right now, where wage theft, worker misclassification, and poor safety standards are the norm.

Studies estimate that 10–30% of employers misclassify workers, a pattern that has remained consistent for decades.² The consequences for workers are severe; for example, a construction worker being misclassified can lose up to \$19,526 a year in wages and benefits. Misclassified workers must pay the full cost of Social Security and Medicare themselves. As a result, total contributions to social insurance drop by 17 to 30 percent, weakening workers' financial security and the broad government safety net.³

Misclassification also leads to wage theft, which results in an estimated \$50 billion per year stolen from workers across the United States. Through private right of action, state agencies and the U.S. Department of Labor, only \$1.5 billion of those stolen wages were recovered between 2017 and 2023.⁴

The government and responsible employers are also harmed by the misclassification of workers. Federal and state governments lose billions of dollars per year in lost tax revenue due to misclassification. This is not because the workers are not paying their taxes, but because employers are not. Between the federal government and individual states, losses are in the billions each year.

At the same time, employers who misclassify their employees save up to 30 percent in payroll costs, giving them an unfair advantage over employers that follow the law. This race to the bottom depresses wages, lowers standards, and forces employers that follow the law to subsidize these bad actors through increased worker compensation and insurance costs. Low-road employers hope undocumented workers are too afraid to come forward and address these issues through government agencies. Taking temporary protected status from an estimated 700,000 workers will only increase the threat of worker misclassification and lead to the underfunding of our federal and state governments.

Before I became General President, I was the Director of Organizing for our union. I saw these issues firsthand. Time after time, immigrant workers shared stories with me about retaliation from their employers when they dared to raise concerns about conditions on the job. I became convinced that secure, legal status is not some abstract issue for construction workers. In fact, it directly shapes the ability of millions of workers to defend themselves and one another on the job. Where people are scared to speak up, standards are lower for

¹ Jesús Villero, Brendan Warshauer, and Youran Wu, 550,000 Workers Lose Status by End of 2025: Potential Impact by State and Industry, Penn Wharton Budget Model, November 19, 2025, available at:

<https://budgetmodel.wharton.upenn.edu/issues/2025/11/19/demographic-and-labor-market-profile-of-tps-beneficiaries>

² Adewale A. Maye, Daniel Perez, and Margaret Poydock, Misclassifying Workers as Independent Contractors Is Costly for Workers and States, Economic Policy Institute, January 22, 2025 available at

<https://www.epi.org/publication/misclassifying-workers-2025-update/>

³*Id.*

⁴ Margaret Poydock and Jiayi (Sonia) Zhang, More Than \$1.5 Billion in Stolen Wages Recovered for Workers Between 2021 and 2023, Economic Policy Institute, December 20, 2024, available at <https://www.epi.org/publication/wage-theft-2021-23/>

everyone across the industry – and that is the reality we have experienced for decades of Congressional inaction on immigration reform.

Our stagnant and outdated labor laws have compounded the problem, allowing low-road contractors to exploit workers with rampant wage theft, misclassification, and other abuses. While all workers can be victims of these practices, immigrant workers are especially at risk because employers know very well that threats around immigration status can be used as a weapon against them.

That is why TPS and other types of immigration relief that provide lawful work authorization are so important – they help provide security for workers and remove status as a threat from employers to crush worker rights and organizing. Simply put, the more workers who have status and work authorization through TPS, the harder it is for bad actors to exploit fear, and the easier it becomes for workers to stand together for fair treatment. Sadly, the reverse is true as well. The fewer workers who have TPS, the more violations will flourish in our industry, driving down standards for all.

Economic Concerns in the Current Climate

As General President of the IUPAT, I spend many weeks traveling the United States meeting members of my union and visiting job sites. I can confidently tell you this: the rapid changes to the TPS program over the last year have left workers uncertain, job sites more dangerous, and projects struggling to remain on schedule.

There is no such thing as an unskilled worker. In the construction trades, especially in the finishing trades that we represent, workers have to be highly skilled and well-trained to be safe and effective. Our members are among the most highly skilled and trained workers in the industry. The demographics of our industry reflect high concentrations of immigrants, among them thousands of TPS recipients, who we encounter and likely represent on job sites across the country.

By abruptly ripping these skilled workers out of the formal economy, our government is not only damaging those workers' lives, but it is also making those job sites less safe for the workers that remain – and less efficient for the contractors running the jobs.

Workers should not be scared to show up for work. And workers should not have to worry that the people they've worked alongside, sometimes for 10 or 20 years, are suddenly going to be pulled from the job site because their work authorization is arbitrarily revoked. Far from being the problem, TPS and other temporary programs that provide work authorization have been a critical tool to reduce exploitation in our industry while we wait for Congress to finally enact the lasting protection these workers expect and deserve.

Conclusion

At the IUPAT, we have a simple mission: to be the strongest, most powerful voice in the industries we represent. And we can only achieve that mission by ensuring that every worker in our crafts has the ability to speak up against things like wage theft, misclassification, and dangerous working conditions. For these reasons, we have long supported bolstering rights, including a path to citizenship, for TPS recipients and all immigrant workers whose labor helps our country prosper. Workers who have been supporting our industry, our economy, and our communities should have their rights protected permanently rather than being kicked to the curb.

I know that issues of immigration bring up emotional responses from all sides. Setting aside for a moment the arguments for dealing with our immigrant neighbors with basic humanity, I want to reiterate that workers with TPS have followed the rules every step of the way, including passing background checks every 18 months.

Workers in our industry who have Temporary Protected Status have made our job sites safer because they are not afraid to speak up when something feels unsafe – and they have contributed to the overall economy. In fact, the Economic Policy Institute⁵ projects that the end result of the mass deportation agenda, which includes abrupt changes to TPS designations, will result in huge labor shortages and rising unemployment rates for all workers – immigrant and U.S.-born alike. TPS recipients and other immigrant workers have built up our American economy, and it is wrong to pull the rug out from underneath them.

⁵ Ben Zipperer, *Trump's Deportation Agenda Will Destroy Millions of Jobs*, Economic Policy Institute, July 10, 2025, available at: <https://www.epi.org/publication/trumps-deportation-agenda-will-destroy-millions-of-jobs-both-immigrants-and-u-s-born-workers-would-suffer-job-losses-particularly-in-construction-and-child-care/>