



Teens Demand Action for Immigrants Halted by Green Card Backlog

Ianne Salvosa

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Sarvani Kunapareddy's dream of going into the medical field after college was halted by the green card backlog.

The 17-year-old, alongside one million other immigrants, awaits for permanent residency from a lagging, 1990s-established quota system that leaves immigrants with advanced degrees in limbo for 151 years, according to the [CATO Institute](#). A Senate bill could relocate unallocated visas towards health care workers, but teens like Kunapareddy—who are under their parents' status—are plagued with doubled tuition fees and ineligibility for financial aid because they are considered international students in college applications.

“It’s not just me, but there’s so many people in this boat. I’d say just people aren’t talking about it though,” Kunapareddy said. “It’s not the front cover kind of thing.”

Before COVID-19 occupied headlines, 100,000 letters were sent to Congress by the Skilled Immigrants in America (SIIA). As an SIIA advocate, Kunapareddy empowered her peers to write letters detailing the unfairness of the immigration system.

As a result, Utah Sen. Mike Lee introduced the [Fairness for High Skilled Act](#) in 2019. The proposed bill would abolish the per-country cap for employment-based categories and increase the per-country cap for family-sponsored immigration.

While it does not increase the amount of immigrants allowed in the country, the abolition of the per-country limit will provide a more fair opportunity for the immigrants affected by the backlog.

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Through advocacy, Kunapareddy takes any opportunity to educate. In February 2018, Kunapareddy traveled to St. Louis to meet with then-state Senator Claire McCaskill, propelled by her data that captured how the backlog disadvantages skilled workers and students like her.

“I try to stay cool-headed and remember that you can’t control what other people think; you can only control what your actions are,” she said.

To discuss the impact the backlog has on immigrants, Kunapareddy represented herself and other children in her situation at Senator Claire McCaskill's office. (Kunapareddy)

She models herself after her mother, Krishna, an independent advocate who immigrated alone from India in 2006 for her masters degree in urban planning at University of Texas at Arlington, obtaining an H-1B visa, rather than a dependent on her husband's. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services states about 80 percent of H-1B holders are male.

She said it is difficult for backlogged families to advocate for their unstable residency status.

"Even though there are people going through the issue, they don't want to accept it," Krishna said.

As a green card applicant under her parents, Kunapareddy is forced to reapply as an adult in four years if her parents are still stuck in the backlog. If she doesn't, she could face deportation.

"Some people have been denied visas and stuck outside the country separated from their families," said Brent Renison, an immigration lawyer based out of Portland, Ore.

SIIA advocate, Prasenjit Shil, worries after he obtains residency, his nine-year-old son will face his own complications.

"The way math stacks up, looks like I'm not gonna get my green card until my son becomes 21 years old," Shil said.

Once a medical school hopeful, Kunapareddy set her eyes on computer science instead. University of Missouri-Kansas City, which used to be her college of interest, does not admit international students into their M.D. program.

"Even people who are affected are like 'Oh it's not a big deal,' But in the end, it's a very big deal," Kunapareddy said. "It's going to affect how you live your life."