

**DRAFT**

April 28, 2015

Members of the Washington Congressional Delegation:

The City of Bellevue is the most diverse city in Washington State and one of the most diverse cities in the nation. With over 80 languages spoken in Bellevue schools and people of color representing over 40% of our residential population, diversity has become one of the city's biggest economic assets and defining characteristics.

Immigration reform is an important issue to Bellevue, its families and businesses. It is essential to the economic viability of Bellevue and Washington State that employers have access to the talent they need to continue innovating and competing at the highest levels. Equally important is the access to green cards that allow the spouses and families of highly-skilled workers to stay together.

Employers, particularly in the technology sector, continue to face challenges in recruiting and retaining highly-skilled workers and often use temporary H-1B visas to recruit and hire highly-educated immigrants. In recent years, the H-1B visa cap has been reached within days of applications becoming available, effectively blocking employers' access to talent. H-1B visas often are used to initially hire highly-skilled professionals, and then employment-based green cards allow US companies to keep these talented individuals in the workforce.

Under current law, there are 140,000 employment-based green cards issued each year, and the total number of green cards available to natives of any particular country is capped at seven percent. This limit has created a decades-long backlog of highly-skilled green card applicants from certain countries including India and China. This backlog has the effect of limiting innovation as qualified green card applicants remain in limbo – sometimes for a decade or more.

We are encouraged by the recent efforts in Congress to address the backlog of visas and green cards for highly-skilled immigrant workers and their families. We support bipartisan, commonsense action by Congress to move forward to fix the green card and H-1B visa systems.

Legislation to phase out the per-country limits and replace them with a first-come, first-served system will reduce wait times for qualified, highly-skilled workers and enable companies to compete in the global economy, create more jobs and invest in our communities. H.R. 213, S. 153 and other, similar proposals will allow companies to focus on hiring the most qualified personnel to keep creating products, services and jobs.

Thank you to Representatives Adam Smith, Rick Larsen, Jim McDermott and Dave Reichert for co-sponsoring H.R. 213. The City of Bellevue appreciates your support of commonsense solutions to these issues. We encourage Congress to take the next step to address the problems with the green card and H-1B visa systems and continue to work toward our shared goal of a strong economy.

Sincerely,

Claudia Balducci, Mayor  
City of Bellevue

CC: Bellevue City Council