



Primer: The “Dignity Act” Is Another Trojan Horse for Amnesty

By: Brendan O’Connell

On July 15, 2025, Congresswomen Maria Salazar (R-FL) and Veronica Escobar (D-TX), leading a bipartisan group of representatives, introduced H.R. 4393, called the “Dignity Act.” The act claims to uphold the biblical principles of dignity, fix the country’s immigration system, and give support to American workers. In reality, the bill is a weak compromise that only concedes to the left’s agenda of mass immigration. The so-called *Dignity Act* would grant amnesty of various kinds to millions of illegal immigrants, handicap immigration and border law enforcement, and perpetuate the unrestricted foreign student pipeline that has been proven to undermine national security. It should be immediately rejected.

Proponents of this bill, like others before it, argue that it does not offer amnesty. This is false. Rightly understood, amnesty is any immigration policy other than what current immigration law requires: the deportation of anyone who has violated U.S. law by entering the country illegally. The *Dignity Act* is a false compromise that would cede every leverage point to the side of mass immigration. It offers the construction of the border wall (something already mandated in law) and mandatory E-Verify in exchange for mass amnesty (which would defeat the purpose of verification in the first place).

On November 6, 1986, Ronald Reagan signed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) into law during the 99th Congress. He was willing to compromise with those who favored leniency towards undocumented immigrants by granting amnesty for millions of them and extracting promises of tougher border security and penalties for employers hiring illegal immigrants in exchange. His side of the bargain never materialized. Since then, border security has been basically nonexistent (until President Donald Trump locked it down). Millions of illegals have been allowed to enter the country, with no noteworthy punishment of employers to be mentioned. Conservatives continue to be suckered into approving dangerously lenient immigration policy in exchange for false promises of tightened borders.

A Tale of Two Amnesties

DREAMer Provisions

The *Dignity Act* would grant amnesty with a direct path toward citizenship for some 2.5 million “DREAMers” under a similar framework to Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).¹

¹ Dignity Act of 2025, H.R. ___, 118th Cong. §§ 2102–05 (2025).

DACA individuals were protected from removal under the program when President Barack Obama issued an Executive Memorandum deferring deportation if on June 12, 2012, they had been in the country for at least five years, were minors upon entry, and had no serious felonies or misdemeanors on their legal records.² The Obama administration claimed this policy was not amnesty,³ but the fact remains that over 800,000 individuals who had entered this country illegally were indefinitely protected from removal. As of December 31, 2020, anywhere from 600,000 to 800,000 DACA recipients were in the country.⁴ Most of them are now adults in their twenties and thirties.⁵

The *Dignity Act* would create a new class of DREAMers by granting conditional permanent residency (CPR) to individuals who:

- Entered the United States illegally as minors *before* January 1, 2021
- Have continuous presence (in the United States without significant interruption since the above cutoff date)
- Have education credentials/enrollment
- Have a clean criminal record

CPR status for DREAMers would be valid for up to ten years and could be adjusted to lawful permanent resident (LPR) status at any time by:

- Obtaining a postsecondary degree
- Serving a minimum of three years in the U.S. armed forces and obtaining an honorable discharge, or
- Working for four years with a valid work authorization and meeting a minimum work participation rate of 75 percent (meaning they must have been legally employed for at least three out of those four years)

In summary, under § 2102 of Salazar's bill, aliens who have entered the country while under age eighteen and before 2021 would be given CPR status.⁶ After meeting certain work, military, or

² U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, "Frequently Asked Questions," updated January 24, 2025, https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/consideration-of-deferred-action-for-childhood-arrivals-daca/frequently-asked-questions#DACA_process.

³ The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by the President on Immigration," press release, June 15, 2012, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/06/15/remarks-president-immigration>.

⁴ Andorra Bruno, "Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA): By the Numbers," Congressional Research Service, April 14, 2021, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/homsec/R46764.pdf>.

⁵ Alisa Reznick, "New USCIS Data Shows Most DACA Recipients Are over 30 Years Old," *KJZZ Phoenix*, September 10, 2024, <https://www.kjzz.org/fronteras-desk/2024-09-10/new-uscis-data-shows-most-daca-recipients-are-over-30-years-old>.

⁶ Dignity Act § 2102: "(A) the alien has been continuously physically present in the United States since January 1, 2021; (B) the alien was 18 years of age or younger on the date on which the alien entered the United States and has continuously resided in the United States since such entry."

education requirements, they can adjust to LPR status, which under 8 U.S.C. § 1427 automatically opens a pathway to citizenship.⁷ The bill disclaims amnesty but clearly would set millions of people who violated U.S. immigration law on the road to taking on the full rights of citizenship, including voting.⁸

The Dignity Program

The bill's Dignity Program, which applies to an estimated 10.5 million undocumented individuals, would offer legal residency without a direct path to citizenship.

- It would grant a seven-year deferral on deportation to all undocumented individuals continuously present since December 31, 2020, or before, regardless of age.
- Eligible individuals would receive employment and travel authorization.

Application to the program would require:

- A criminal background check
- Restitution fines totaling \$7,000 over seven years
- Payment of back taxes
- Enrollment in health insurance
- Work/school participation for at least four years
- Biannual check-ins with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)
- No use of federal means-tested benefits

The *Dignity Act* contains provisions waiving one misdemeanor offense if illegals have not been convicted of one in the five years preceding application to the Dignity Program, and waives two if they have not been convicted in the ten years preceding.⁹ The bill would provide categorical waivers for these offenses and would effectively freeze deportation for any applicant who meets the threshold for eligibility. In doing so, it would extend effective amnesty—without offering a direct path to citizenship—to an estimated 10.5 million illegal aliens present in the United States prior to 2021.¹⁰ While not a direct path to citizenship, the program would provide for legal status for an indefinite period of time.

- Participants can live and work legally in the United States and travel abroad with authorization once approved.

⁷ 8 U.S. Code § 1427, "Requirements of Naturalization," accessed August 14, 2025, <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/8/1427>.

⁸ Benjamin Osborne, "Legislative Summary on the *Dignity Act of 2025*," July 2025, on file with Center for Renewing America staff.

⁹ Dignity Act § 2302 (4) (A), (B: i-ii).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, § 2301–05.

- After completing the initial seven-year dignity phase (and paying the \$7,000 restitution and taxes and meeting work/education requirements), participants could renew their status indefinitely as long as they remain in compliance.

Amnesty, as noted above, is properly understood as anything less than the deportation of any individual who has entered the country illegally and violated immigration law. These provisions, which would create the opportunity for illegals to remain in the country indefinitely, constitute such amnesty.

The bill would impose a twenty-four-month freeze on deportation for any accepted participant. This freeze would prevent fines or removal of illegals based on their immigration status, effectively tying the Trump administration's hands in its deportation efforts.¹¹ Shockingly, the requirements for proof of continuous presence under the bill's Dignity Program would allow the submission of nongovernmental or third-party forms of evidence to the DHS to establish the illegal immigrant's presence in the United States,¹² just like the IRCA amnesty program did in 1986.¹³ A 1989 GAO report determined that 39 percent of "evidence" submitted for said program was fraudulent.¹⁴ There is no reason to think that the Dignity Program under Salazar's bill would lead to a different outcome. There is no motivation for an illegal to depart the United States before or after participation in the program, which undermines the goal President Trump and a huge portion of the conservative movement have been striving to achieve: removal and repatriation of people who entered the country unlawfully.¹⁵ That a Republican member of Congress has proposed such a bill is a betrayal of the millions of Americans who gave the GOP control of the executive branch and both chambers of Congress and a mandate to properly handle the issue of immigration.

The Dignity Program under the bill is not tied to full compliance with E-Verify requirements, and it does not impose any retroactive penalties on employers who previously hired unauthorized workers.¹⁶ Reagan's mass amnesty in 1986 led to California becoming a perpetually blue state with a massive vote count in the Electoral College guaranteed for Democrats in national elections.¹⁷ While California cannot get any more blue in this respect, this situation allows the Democratic Party to secure millions of voters in every election as part of its long-term strategy to

¹¹ Ibid., § 2302 (d).

¹² Ibid., § 2207 (b).

¹³ *Code of Federal Regulations*, Title 8, Chapter I, Subchapter B, Part 245a, Subpart B § 245a.16.

¹⁴ U.S. General Accounting Office, "Immigration Reform: Status of Implementing Employer Sanctions After Second Year," GAO Report GCD-89-16, November 1988, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/ggd-89-16.pdf>.

¹⁵ Osborne, "Legislative Summary on the *Dignity Act of 2025*."

¹⁶ Dignity Act § 2302, setting Dignity Program eligibility criteria without requiring employer use of E-Verify, and § 1408, authorizing prospective civil penalties for unlawful hiring but containing no provision for retroactive punishment of employers.

¹⁷ NPR Staff, "A Reagan Legacy: Amnesty for Illegal Immigrants," *All Things Considered*, July 4, 2010, <https://www.npr.org/2010/07/04/128303672/a-reagan-legacy-amnesty-for-illegal-immigrants>, showing that the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 granted amnesty to almost three million illegal immigrants.

turn America into a one-party state. The bill disclaims amnesty but clearly sets millions of people who violated U.S. immigration law on the road to the full rights of citizenship, including voting.¹⁸ Those in the Dignity Program may not be given a direct way toward citizenship, but even conceding this much is dangerous. Were this bill to be passed and millions of illegals allowed to remain in the country, it is likely that Salazar and Republicans like her would be emboldened to take more blatant measures of amnesty.

Foreign Student Pipeline

The bill would undermine Trump’s efforts to crack down on foreign student residency by allowing all such individuals to declare intent to remain in the United States, codifying Optional Practical Training (OPT). OPT is a temporary work authorization for international students holding F-1 visas to gain practical experience in their field of study while subjecting their wages to Social Security taxes to validate that authorization.

The bill also would allow graduate STEM or medical students of foreign origin on F-1 visas to self-petition for uncapped O-1 visas and green cards once they earn these postsecondary degrees.¹⁹ Section 3303 of the bill creates a “presumption of eligibility” for F-1 holders who earn STEM PhDs, creating a direct pathway for an O-1 visa to be approved. O-1 visas are temporary U.S. visas that are supposed to be reserved for individuals with extraordinary abilities or achievements. There is no way all of the estimated one million or more foreign students privileged to hold F-1 visas merit consideration for the high distinction of an O-1 visa.²⁰ The original intent of O-1 visas was to allow particularly brilliant foreigners who had already demonstrated outstanding achievements to reside in the United States. By presuming that certain STEM or medical PhD graduates are eligible, the bill would effectively shift the O-1 from a merit-based standard to a credentials-based shortcut to residency. A recent graduate, even from a reputable U.S. program, may have academic promise but not yet a record of extraordinary achievement, and granting him or her an O-1 visa would dilute its original intention. This provision would also put talented native-born U.S. college graduates at a disadvantage in the jobs market in a time when young people find it increasingly difficult to find gainful employment after graduation.

Other Actions

As if that weren’t enough, the *Dignity Act* would lead to several additional actions that, in effect, would allow an indeterminate number of illegals to remain in the country and make it more difficult to repatriate them. It would give future presidential administrations the option to grant

¹⁸ Osborne, “Legislative Summary on the *Dignity Act of 2025*.”

¹⁹ Dignity Act § 3304 (h) (1).

²⁰ Defending Education, “International Students in US Higher Education—Defending Education,” July 21, 2025, <https://defendinged.org/investigations/foreign-student-enrollment-in-higher-ed/>.

amnesty to illegals who are the spouses or children of citizens, opening the door to chain migration.²¹ It would prohibit immigration law enforcement from operating in certain “protected areas,” such as schools, hospitals, places of worship, locations with demonstrations, or areas where children gather,²² requiring approval from senior leadership or exigent circumstances for the authorities to circumvent.²³ It would codify the Flores Settlement Agreement, which purported to establish standards of care and oversight for unaccompanied children but in practice has only fueled the exploitation and trafficking of minors.²⁴ It would create a new “humanitarian status” for certain illegals who are considered eligible (meaning initially eligible under existing U.S. law, triggering a review process during which penalties such as deportation are frozen) for asylum during pre-screening abroad, with admissions capped at the annual refugee level,²⁵ the most recent, for FY 2025, being 125,000.²⁶ It would allow aliens with approved green card applications to bypass the per-country caps by paying a supplemental \$20,000 fee if they have been waiting for ten years or longer,²⁷ a provision that purports to target a real backlog for applications from countries such as India and Mexico.²⁸ It would also greatly multiply employment visas by excluding immediate family members from the cap.²⁹

Claims of Upholding Biblical Dignity

²¹ Dignity Act § 3112 (a)(D)(1): I-IV. The circumstances of how a child of a citizen could be an illegal are not specified in the text of the bill. One possible scenario is this: (1) A child was born in Mexico in 2004 to a U.S. citizen father who had spent most of his life outside the United States and didn’t meet the physical presence requirement for transmitting citizenship. (2) That child is legally a noncitizen, even though the father is American. (3) Under current law, that child would generally need to immigrate through legal family sponsorship, but for whatever reason, the child was brought into the country illegally. (4) Under the Dignity Act, being “the child of a U.S. citizen” could be a favorable factor for eligibility or a waiver.

²² Ibid., § 1122 (C) (i)–(ix).

²³ Ibid., § 1122 (2): (A)–(B).

²⁴ Ibid., § 1511; Kaelan Deese, “Trump Seeks End to Flores Decree Long Used to Push Liberal ‘Open Borders’ Agenda,” *Washington Examiner*, May 23, 2025,

<https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/policy/immigration/3420590/trump-flores-settlement-agreement-seeks-end-liberal-open-borders-agenda/>.

²⁵ Dignity Act § 1514 (W).

²⁶ Global Refuge, “U.S. Resettles Most Refugees in Three Decades, Maintains FY 2025 Refugee Cap at 125,000,” press release, September 30, 2024, <https://www.globalrefuge.org/news/refugees-resettlement-three-decades/>.

²⁷ Dignity Act § 3201 (F): (i)–(ii).

²⁸ The August 2025 *Visa Bulletin* data shows that the EB-2 category for India remains “retrogressed”—i.e., not current—and continues to lag significantly, with the final action date still back in January 1, 2013, despite decades-long processing. See Rebekah Kim, “August 2025 *Visa Bulletin*: EB-2 Worldwide Final Action Dates Retrogress, EB-3 India Advances,” Ogletree Deakins, July 16, 2025, <https://ogletree.com/insights-resources/blog-posts/august-2025-visa-bulletin-eb-2-worldwide-final-action-dates-retrogress-eb-3-india-advances/>. *Boundless Immigration* reports that current processing dates vary significantly by country; for Mexican siblings of U.S. citizens, the current processing date is April 2001, representing a twenty-four-year backlog enduring as of 2025. See Alison Moodie, Green Card Processing Times—FY 2025,” *Boundless Immigration*, updated April 1, 2025, <https://www.boundless.com/immigration-resources/average-green-card-wait-times/>.

²⁹ Dignity Act § 3301 (I).

On Salazar's official webpage for the *Dignity Act*, there is a vague claim that the provisions of the bill are based upon "biblical principles of Dignity."³⁰ Nowhere on this page, the summary, or breakdown of the bill, nor even in the text of the bill itself, is there any attempt to explain why this bill's provisions or the effects it would have are firmly rooted in "biblical principles of Dignity." The use of the word "dignity" seems to be based on the premise that removing an illegal immigrant from the country or declining some sort of protected status to those who have violated immigration laws is somehow, in and of itself, opposed to the principles of human dignity, but this argument is never demonstrated. There is no contradiction between the leaders of a nation upholding the immigration laws of their country and the real duties of charity toward people of foreign origin; statesmen must first look to their own people.³¹

This bill attempts to guilt American Christians into feeling as though they are uncharitable or un-Christian if they express any reservations about the elite's reckless attitude toward mass migration.

Conclusion

The *Dignity Act* is marketed as reform, rooted in compromise, and designed to disarm opposition with vague appeals to "biblical . . . Dignity." In reality, it is a Trojan horse that would codify mass amnesty, weaken enforcement, and reward those who have broken U.S. immigration law, all while leaving American workers and communities to bear the cost. By repeating the mistakes of the 1986 amnesty and adding new carveouts, waivers, and permanent legal statuses, the bill would ensure that illegal immigration would not only persist but accelerate. The United States cannot afford another false bargain on immigration. Congress must reject the *Dignity Act* and instead pursue policies that secure the border, enforce existing laws, deport criminal illegal aliens, and protect the sovereignty of the American people.

³⁰ Office of Congresswoman Maria Salazar, "The Dignity Act," press release, accessed August 14, 2025, <https://salazar.house.gov/dignity-act>.

³¹ Nathan Pinkoski, "Immigration for Christians," Center for Renewing America, July 24, 2025, <https://americarenewing.com/immigration-for-christians/>: "1 Timothy 5:8: 'But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.' Commenting on this passage, St. Thomas Aquinas argues that loving those who are close to us is necessary to fulfill the duties of charity. This love begins with our blood relations, then extends to our fellow citizens."