



# Presentation to the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

## **Economic Imperative and Long-Term Importance for Small Rural Municipalities Outside of Major Cities to Retain New Immigrants | June 21, 2021**

Honourable Members of Parliament,

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you today on behalf of the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, which serves as the Secretariat for the Migrant Rights Network - Canada's only national migrant-led coalition. Cumulatively, Migrant Rights Network member organizations are directly connected to tens of thousands of migrant farm workers, care workers, international students, refugees, asylum seekers, post-graduate work permit holders and undocumented residents.

The IRCC Deputy Minister provided evidence to this committee that only 41 individuals have been selected since 2019 through the Rural Immigration Nominee Program. Similarly, the Thunder Bay Community Economic Development Commission stated that it put forward 69 applications last year. These numbers are miniscule, and do not fully represent the reality of immigration in rural communities which is primarily temporary, not permanent.

Consider again Thunder Bay. In 2018, the last year for which statistics are available, there were 2,725 study permits and an additional 300 temporary work permits issued in just that year.

This is true across the country. Each year there are more than twice as many temporary permits as permanent resident visas. The total number of temporary and undocumented residents exceeds 1.6 million.

Without permanent resident status, migrants do not have the same rights or protections or access to essential services as other residents. This is a policy choice that costs lives and livelihoods, and derails any hope of building integrated, strong, and growing local communities.

One of the largest groups of immigrants in rural communities are agricultural and food processing workers. In the interests of time, I echo the evidence provided by Justice for Migrant Workers in the previous session. I want to read into the record the names we know of some of the 13 migrant farm workers that have died in Canada just this year, 7 of them in federally regulated quarantine.

1. Logan Grant
2. Victor Paz Lozoya



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3. Roberto Jacob Baca Gomez
4. Jose Antonio Coronado
5. Romario Morgan
6. Fausto Ramirez Plazas
7. Aneish Dalbarry
8. Efren Reyes

These deaths are the result of unequal access to rights and protections which is dictated by a system of temporary migration.

The majority of migrants are workers, even those on study permits. They pay rent and taxes, and add significantly to the economic and social fabric of rural communities. The only way to ensure they can continue to contribute to rural communities and have equal rights is to ensure permanent resident status for all.

Deputy Minister Tapley also spoke in glowing terms about the role of employers in rural and provincial nominee programs, particularly in the Atlantic Immigration Pilot. This does not reflect the experiences of migrants.

Just one example from Prince Edward Island. Two years ago, a father and a son, both migrant agricultural workers, were nominated by their employer; the father in the first year, and the son in the second. The father, upon completion of his permanent residency application, made a Ministry of Labour complaint for thousands of dollars in unpaid wages. The employer immediately rescinded the son's nomination. The father withdrew his Ministry of Labour complaint, but the employer refused to nominate the son again, whose work permit expired soon after, and he was forced to leave the country.

This is not an aberration. Immigration pilot programs require job offers from employers which often engenders exploitation and abuse. Workers are forced to compete with each other with promises that the person who works the hardest and the longest hours will be sponsored. Job offer requirements allow employers to dangle the possibility of stability, decent work and family reunification over migrants like a carrot that is really a stick. Many migrants are forced to accept even further exploitation, for the promise of a job offer that may not even materialize.

Pilot programs are putting significant and unchecked power into the hands of employers without oversight or recourse to appeals or justice for migrants.

Another significant issue in these programs is the language test requirements that excludes non-English or French speakers. Many migrants, particularly from Spanish speaking countries, have been living, working and contributing to rural communities for years without needing the English or French language level that is required in these programs. The barriers to integration



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for migrants in rural areas are created by their lack of access to permanent residency, not by their language level or work prospects.

2020 has shown us the incredible centrality of migrant work to our economy and society. Ensuring that all migrant and undocumented people have the ability to protect themselves and assert their rights is necessary. This is only possible with permanent resident status on arrival and for all. Such programs must not be employer dependent, and must not require language testing.

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