

CARL WELCOMES NEW PROGRAM PROVIDING PATHWAY TO PERMANENT RESIDENCE FOR FRONTLINE PANDEMIC WORKERS

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The Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers (CARL) welcomes today's announcement by the Federal Government of a pathway to permanent residence for certain pandemic workers on the frontline of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The new public policy program provides an opportunity to apply for permanent residence to frontline workers who provide direct patient healthcare. The program covers people in the refugee stream who are working in health facilities, in long-term care homes, and providing at home care. They have been critical in protecting the health and welfare of Canada's most vulnerable. CARL applauds this program as an important recognition of the incredible task these workers have undertaken.

This program is in keeping with Canada's humanitarian tradition of helping vulnerable people in times of need, and recognizes the sacrifice and contribution made by pandemic workers to keep us safe. Maureen Silcoff, President of CARL, says: "We are living in extraordinary times and the program reflects that. While most of us have stayed home to help flatten the curve, essential workers have been risking their own health to protect ours. These workers have helped keep us safe, not even knowing whether they can stay in Canada."

In addition, the program is economically sound. Immigration is critical to the strength of the Canadian economy, and the number of new permanent residents is expected to fall by about half this year as a result of pandemic-related restrictions. Meeting Canada's immigration targets is vital to our economic health, and this new pathway to permanent residence will help resolve that drop and ensure a healthy economy. That is something that all Canadians benefit from.

While this program reflects these extraordinary times, Canada has used public policy programs in the past. "Programs such as the public policy for pandemic workers are grounded in fairness, compassion, and economic necessity. They acknowledge not only the contributions made by these individuals to their communities, but also Canada's dependence on their labour," says Kate Webster, CARL's Advocacy Co-Chair.

CARL executive member Coline Bellefleur says "Despite their own precarious situation and sometimes poor working conditions, these people have not spared any efforts during the pandemic. This program is a tangible way to recognize some of those who lack permanent status."

CARL sees this program as an important step in acknowledging the work of many on the frontlines. We encourage the Government to expand the scope of the program and consider other facets of essential work beyond health care.

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