

The Economic and Fiscal Impacts of Mass Deportation in Rhode Island

Immigrants are vital to Rhode Island's communities and economy, contributing to the workforce, tax base, and small business landscape.



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The Economic and Fiscal Impacts of Mass Deportation: What's at Risk in Rhode Island

The authors would like to thank Emily Eisner, Andrew Perry, and Nathan Gusdorf of the Fiscal Policy Institute, who with David Dyssegaard Kallick co-authored a similar report in New York State that was jointly published by the Fiscal Policy Institute and Immigration Research Initiative.

Rhode Island prides itself as a welcoming state—one that values and respects immigrants and recognizes their immense contributions to our economy, communities, and culture. There are **175,000 immigrants** (16 percent of the local population) who call Rhode Island home.

The Trump Administration is undertaking an unprecedented intensity of enforcement actions to remove immigrants from their communities, from their workplaces, and often from their families. The administration is promising to radically reduce the number of new immigrants allowed into the country and has stripped some documented immigrants of their legal status or work authorization.

The most vulnerable immigrants are those who are undocumented. But the impact does not end there. People with temporary visas may have their visas terminated or not renewed. People with temporary protected status, asylum seekers, DACA recipients, and many others are also in a precarious position.

There are far-reaching social and humanitarian implications of this type of enforcement regime. But there is also an economic risk that can be quantified. This report details the economic risks to Rhode Island of increased immigration enforcement and mass deportations, including:

- Potential risks to occupations with a large percentage of immigrant workers, such as construction laborers, doctors, maids, and nurses;
- Job losses for U.S.-born workers in roles that depend on immigrant workers; and
- A loss in state and local tax revenue paid by immigrants who are undocumented, which could be as much as \$95 million, at a time when Rhode Island is experiencing a tight budget.¹

¹ Carl Davis, Marco Guzman, and Emma Sifre, “Tax Payments by Undocumented Immigrants,” Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, July 30, 2024.

Both Undocumented Immigrants and Those with Legal Status are at Risk for Deportation

Of the 175,000 immigrants who live in Rhode Island, 81,000 people were non-citizens in 2024.² An estimated 50,000 immigrants in Rhode Island were undocumented. The other non-citizen immigrants have a range of legal statuses, including legal permanent residents (green card holders), Temporary Protected Status (TPS) recipients, student visa holders, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients, asylum seekers, and H1-B visa holders (for highly skilled workers).

The federal government's immigration policies have increasingly put immigrants with lawful status at risk, including roughly **1.3 million Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders** in the U.S. as of early 2025.³ Recent moves to terminate TPS designations for nationals from multiple countries could result in hundreds of thousands losing legal status and work authorization, though several of these actions have been blocked or stayed by federal courts. Litigation is ongoing, with outcomes still uncertain, leaving the future of many TPS recipients—and their ability to remain and work in the U.S.—in legal limbo. And the administration is currently moving to revoke the citizenship of immigrants who have become naturalized citizens; it is reportedly planning to move to de-naturalize 100 to 200 citizens per month.⁴

The administration has also targeted student visa holders and legal permanent residents for deportation, based on political speech and activities.⁵ The fear stoked by these actions affects immigrants who have legal status or are citizens, especially those who live in mixed-immigration status households, where some family members are citizens or have other legal immigration status while others are undocumented.

² For the number of immigrants, non-citizen immigrants, and estimate of immigrants who are undocumented, see the Immigration Research Initiative fact sheet, "[50 States: Immigrants by Number and Share](#)." All immigrants, U.S.-born, total population, and non-citizen immigrants come from Immigration Research Initiative analysis of the 2024 American Community Survey. Number of immigrants who are undocumented is estimated by the Pew Research Center based on the 2023 ACS.

³ Jesús Villero, Brendan Warshauer, and Youran Wu under the direction of Alex Arnon, "[550,000 Workers Lose Status by End of 2025: Potential Impact by State and Industry](#)", Penn Wharton Budget Model, November 19, 2025.

⁴ Hamed Aleaziz, "[Trump Administration Aims to Strip More Foreign-Born Americans of Citizenship](#)" New York Times, December 17, 2025.

⁵ Tara Watson and Jonathan Zars, "[100 days of immigration under the second Trump administration](#)," Brookings Institution, April 29, 2025.

Mass Deportations Pose Broad Risks for Rhode Island's Economy

Mass deportations would affect Rhode Island's economic output, tax revenues, and business activity. Immigrant workers, both documented and undocumented, accounted for **16 percent of GDP in Rhode Island in 2023**.⁶ *Undocumented immigrants contribute \$95 million in state and local taxes, which help pay for vital programs and services that Rhode Islanders rely on.* Furthermore, 20 percent, or 1 out of every 5, business owners in Rhode Island in 2023 were immigrants, providing a vital economic engine.⁷ These businesses help maintain the vibrancy of Rhode Island's economy by spurring innovation, hiring workers, and adding locally owned storefront shops that keep neighborhoods vibrant.

A loss of large numbers of workers from the Rhode Island labor force would mean higher costs for Rhode Islanders, who would pay more for restaurants, child care, home health aides, construction, farm goods, and more. Costs will go up not only because immigrants are often underpaid, but more fundamentally because there will be an undersupply of workers.

A labor supply shortage will force businesses to shrink. As much as they can, businesses would adjust by hiring new workers. However, the labor force is already constrained. The unemployment rate was 4.5 percent in February 2026.⁸ Employers are already straining to find employees; eliminating large numbers of workers from the labor force will not help.

Deporting the 50,000 undocumented workers in Rhode Island would result in a predictable decline of jobs for U.S.-born workers, according to a leading journal article on the subject.⁹ Contrary to popular belief, deporting immigrants reduces the number of jobs for other workers. Rather than replacing U.S.-born workers, the types of jobs filled by undocumented immigrants, such as construction workers or cooks and dishwashers, complement the types of jobs U.S.-born workers are hired for, such as construction site managers or restaurant servers. If construction companies experience a shortage of construction workers, for example, they cannot take on as many projects, reducing jobs for construction managers. Undocumented immigrants also work in jobs that are essential to others' participation in the workforce, such as providing child care for working parents. Finally, a decline in spending by undocumented immigrants would reduce consumer demand, which could prompt local businesses to downsize and reduce their workforce.¹⁰ All of this adds up to a decrease in work for U.S.-born workers.

⁶ Immigrant share of economic output is estimated by showing the share of all earned income – wages plus proprietors' earnings. The data source is the 2023 American Community Survey, five-year data.

⁷ IRI Analysis of 2023 American Community Survey, five-year data.

⁸ Department of Labor and Training, 2026, *Rhode Island-based Jobs rose by 400 from December; January Unemployment Rate increased to 4.5 Percent*, Department of Labor and Training, <https://dlt.ri.gov/press-releases/rhode-island-based-jobs-rose-400-december-january-unemployment-rate-increased-45#:~:text=Rhode%20Island%2Dbased%20Jobs%20rose,4.0%20percent%20in%20January%202025>.

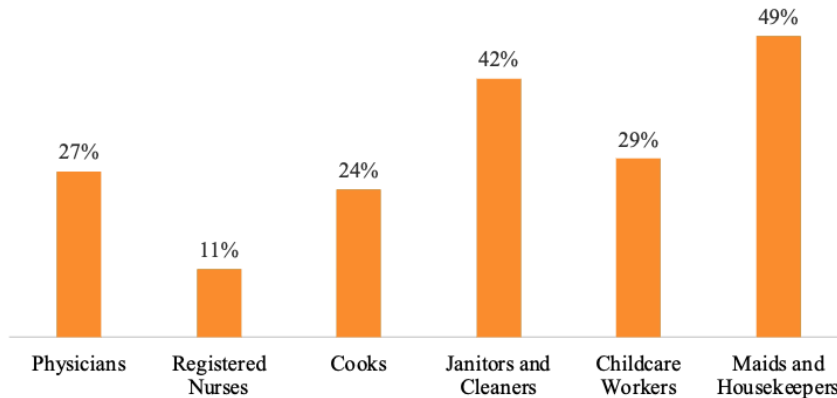
⁹ East, et al. "The Labor Market Effects of Immigration Enforcement," *Journal of Labor Economics*, vol 41, number 4. This work is summarized in an accessible fashion by Chloe N. East in "[The Labor Market Impact of Deportations](#)" The Hamilton Project, Sept. 18, 2024.

¹⁰ Chloe East, "[The Labor Market Impact of Deportations](#)," The Hamilton Project, September 18, 2024.

Child Care, Health Care, Hospitality, and other Critical Sectors will Face Labor Shortages Amid Mass Deportations

We know that nationally, many of these occupations have a significant percentage of undocumented workers, therefore making them more vulnerable to deportation. An estimate from the Pew Research Center shows that 12 percent of cooks, 11 percent of janitors, and 24 percent of maids and housekeepers nationally are undocumented.¹¹ We do not know the exact number of immigrant workers in these occupations in Rhode Island who are undocumented and therefore at the *highest risk* for deportation.

PERCENTAGE OF IMMIGRANT WORKERS IN RHODE ISLAND BY OCCUPATION



Some areas of the Rhode Island economy that are particularly at risk include:

Restaurants: Immigrants play a big role in Rhode Island’s vibrant restaurant industry: in the “front of the house” jobs serving diners, in the “back of the house” jobs in the kitchen, and in so many cases as restaurant owners.

Overall, in the United States, immigrants who are undocumented make up 7 percent of all workers in the leisure and hospitality industry. Undocumented immigrants play a particularly big role in restaurants. There are 275,000 undocumented cooks (12 percent of the total), an additional 60,000 chefs/head cooks (12 percent of the total), and 45,000 dishwashers (13 percent of the total).

In Rhode Island, there are 2,000 immigrant cooks (24 percent of the total), 800 immigrant chefs/head cooks (27 percent of the total), and 300 immigrant dishwashers (20 percent of the total). While some other workers could step into these jobs, there are not enough unemployed workers to meet this demand, and the predictable result is the shrinkage of other jobs that rely on these workers. We do not have state-level data to show how many of these immigrant workers in each job category are undocumented and are therefore most immediately at risk.

¹¹ National estimates of the number of undocumented workers were provided to IRI by Jeff Passel of the Pew Research Center, and are based on an analysis of the 2022 American Community Survey, consistent with the analysis in [“What We Know About Unauthorized Immigrants in the U.S.”](#) Pew Research Center, July 22, 2024.

Personal, home, and office: In the United States, immigrants at risk of deportation are playing an important, if often not-so-visible, role in a range of occupations that touch our everyday lives. There are 275,000 janitors (11 percent of the total) who are undocumented, 230,000 landscaping workers (18 percent of the total), 35,000 nail technicians (13 percent), 20,000 dry cleaning and laundry workers (16 percent), and 325,000 maids and housekeepers working in homes as well as hotels and other workplaces (24 percent of the total).

In Rhode Island, 42 percent of janitors are immigrants (documented and undocumented), totaling 4,000. There are 2,000 landscaping workers who are immigrants (35 percent of the total), 400 nail technicians¹² (70 percent of the total), 200 laundry and dry-cleaning workers (35 percent of the total), and 2,000 maids and housekeepers who work in homes, hotels, and other locations (50 percent of the total).

Construction: Nationally, 1.4 million people who are undocumented work in the construction industry, making up 13 percent of the total. Looking at detailed occupations across all industries, there are 475,000 construction laborers who are unauthorized (18 percent of the total), 240,000 carpenters (14 percent), 170,000 painters¹³ (20 percent), and 70,000 roofers (17 percent).

Removing thousands of workers from the labor force, many of them union members, would increase construction costs, limiting the total construction feasible during a historical housing shortage. In Rhode Island, again, we do not have a detailed estimate of undocumented workers in particular, but there are 7,000 immigrants (both documented and undocumented) in the construction industry. Immigrants make up 17 percent of all workers in the construction industry in Rhode Island.

Farming: Over half of all crop workers in the United States are immigrants, and the vast majority of the immigrants are either undocumented or seasonal H-2A workers, both categories of immigrants that have been threatened by the Trump administration.¹⁴ Pay and working conditions for farm workers are in dire need of improvement. But the likely result of deporting current immigrants and restricting new immigration is not an improvement of working conditions, but a decline in farming.

Farms in Rhode Island are a source of fresh milk, top-quality apples, and other produce, enjoyed around the state and sold for export. Farms are also important to the economic and social vitality of rural communities, enhance the local landscape, and are part of a growing agritourism industry. In 2023, 16.9 percent of all people employed in the agriculture, forest, fishing, hunting, and mining industry were foreign-born individuals.¹⁵ Eliminating immigrants from farm work would be nearly unimaginable, and reducing the number of immigrant workers by even five or ten percent would have dramatic negative consequences.

¹² Nail technicians include manicurists and pedicurists.

¹³ The occupation “painters” also includes paperhangers.

¹⁴ Gutiérrez-Li, Alejandro. “Feeding America: How Immigrants Sustain US Agriculture,” Baker Institute for Public Policy, July 19, 2024. <https://www.bakerinstitute.org/research/feeding-america-how-immigrants-sustain-us-agriculture>

¹⁵ State Immigration Data Profiles: Rhode Island Language & Education Data, Migration Policy Institute <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/language/RI>

Fear of Deportation is Impeding Immigrants' Participation in Economic and Community Activities

The current climate of fear is having a broader chilling effect beyond those targeted or at increased risk for deportation, including on immigrants with temporary or provisional work permits and even some who hold green cards or are naturalized citizens. Past research has found that during periods of increased immigration enforcement, even immigrants not targeted for deportation were afraid to leave their homes to participate in everyday activities.¹⁶

Fear is particularly acute for the many immigrants in mixed-status families in which some family members are undocumented, and others are U.S. citizens or have another legal immigration status. A survey conducted in December 2024 as people were preparing for the new administration found that 60 percent of respondents in mixed-status families worried about participating in one or more of seven everyday activities, such as going to work, visiting a doctor or hospital, sending children to school, or attending religious services or community events, because they do not want to draw attention to their immigration status or that of a family member.¹⁷

Many immigrants, regardless of status, are choosing to stay home as much as possible to avoid interactions with immigration authorities. A survey of over 2,000 Spanish-speaking immigrants conducted in March 2025 found that 2 in 5 respondents had to miss work because of the federal government's new immigration agenda.¹⁸ As these surveys show, many immigrants are pulling back from economic activities like working or shopping in their local community, avoiding community events, and not engaging in activities vital to their health and mental well-being—all of which harm the immigrants themselves, hurt Rhode Island's economy, and dampen the cultural and community life of this vibrant state.

Immigrants Help Keep Rhode Island Economically Strong and Culturally Vibrant

Mass deportation will harm Rhode Island's economy, thwart business activity, and take a devastating toll on immigrant families and communities. To date, Rhode Island has resisted federal efforts to force Rhode Island to share sensitive personal information about its residents, and Providence has prohibited Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers from operating on city-owned properties without a judicial warrant. Rhode Island policymakers should continue to challenge and resist federal policies that threaten the rights of immigrant communities.

Several legislative proposals introduced in the Rhode Island General Assembly seek to address these concerns by safeguarding civil rights, ensuring access to the courts, and limiting the unintended immigration consequences of minor offenses.

¹⁶ East 2024.

¹⁷ Hamutal Bernstein, Dulce Gonzalez, and Diana Guelespe, "Immigrant Families Express Worry as They Prepare for Policy Changes," The Urban Institute, March 12, 2025.

¹⁸ Anthony Capote, David Dyssegaard Kallick, Cyierra Roldan, and Shamier Settle, "Responding with Courage: How Spanish-Speaking Immigrants Report Being Impacted by the New Deportation Regime", The Immigration Research Initiative, May 8, 2025. For more on the how deportation fears harm immigrants, see: Kristina Fullerton Rico, "Deportation fears create ripple effects for immigrants and their communities," The Conversation, February 19, 2025.

Taking Action

State Legislative Proposals to Support Immigrants

364 Day Misdemeanor: The legislative proposal would redefine the maximum sentence for a misdemeanor in Rhode Island as 364 days rather than 365 days. Because federal immigration law treats offenses punishable by one year or more as deportable offenses, this one-day change would help prevent minor state offenses from triggering severe immigration consequences, such as detention or deportation, for long-time residents.

Federal Constitution Defense Act: This proposed act would create a state cause of action allowing individuals to sue federal officials who violate constitutional rights while acting under federal authority. The proposal would allow people harmed by unlawful actions by federal immigration agents to seek damages and other legal relief in state court.

The Protect Our Courts Act: Lastly, this proposal protects individuals attending court proceedings from civil arrests by federal immigration authorities without a judicial warrant, ensuring that victims, witnesses, and defendants can access the justice system without fear of immigration enforcement.

Municipal Strategies to Support Immigrants

Across Rhode Island, cities and towns play a critical role in shaping the daily realities of immigrant residents, often more directly than the federal or state government. Municipal decisions influence whether families feel safe reporting crimes, accessing local services, enrolling their children in school, or participating fully in civic life. In a state where immigrants are deeply embedded in the workforce, small business economy, and community institutions, local action is not optional; it is foundational.

The following recommendations, produced by the ACLU of Rhode Island, outline practical, **municipal-level** steps that Rhode Island's cities and towns can take to strengthen trust, expand access, and implement safeguards that protect immigrant residents' safety and well-being.

Data Privacy

- *Protect Sensitive Data:* Municipalities should prohibit the use of local resources to create or support federal registries based on protected characteristics, reinforcing civil rights and community trust.
- *Limit Immigration Data Collection:* Local governments should minimize the collection of immigration-related information and ensure all residents can access services without discrimination.
- *Restrict Surveillance Practices:* Law enforcement agencies (LEAs) should not monitor political or religious groups absent a clear, specific criminal investigatory basis.

(continued)

- *Support Immigrant Crime Victims:* LEAs should maintain procedures to assist eligible undocumented victims in applying for visas (e.g., U visas) to promote safety and cooperation.
- *Protect Student Information:* School districts should adopt clear policies on responding to immigration-agency requests, limiting cooperation to what is required by federal law.
- *Promote Transparency:* LEAs should publicly report data on ICE and CBP detainer and notification requests to ensure accountability and compliance.

Funding Immigration Legal Services

- *Establish Legal Defense Funds:* Municipalities may create or contribute to legal defense funds that support nonprofit providers offering free immigration representation to low-income residents.
- *Implement Universal Representation Models:* Cities and towns can develop programs to provide legal representation for detained residents, improving fairness in immigration proceedings.
- *Leverage Partnerships:* Municipalities should partner with community foundations and nonprofits to administer funds and expand service capacity.
- *Invest in Community-Based Providers:* Local governments may allocate funding and contract with qualified nonprofits to represent residents facing detention, deportation, or seeking humanitarian relief.
- *Track Outcomes and Scale Programs:* Municipalities should monitor program performance (e.g., representation rates, case outcomes) and design initiatives to serve residents across jurisdictions.

Limiting Cooperation with Federal Immigration Authorities

- *Prohibit Status-Based Policing:* LEAs should not stop, question, or detain individuals based solely on suspected immigration status, nor inquire about victims' or witnesses' status absent a legitimate investigative need.
- *Limit Compliance Without Judicial Warrants:* Absent a judicial warrant, LEAs should not honor civil immigration detainers, share sensitive non-public information, or provide access to individuals in custody.
- *Ensure Due Process Protections:* Ensure individuals receive timely notice of immigration enforcement requests, are informed of their rights, and are not delayed bail or treated differently based solely on immigration status.

Additional Resources and Policy Approaches from Other Organizations

In addition to the RI ACLU's recommendations, several municipalities and organizations have acted across the country and have provided examples, toolkits, and policy frameworks that Rhode Island municipalities may also find useful:

- The Guardian article "[ICE-free zones and blocked liquor licenses: US cities fight back against immigration raids](#)" highlights how cities across the U.S. have established "ICE-free" zones, while other municipalities have developed strategies in collaboration with their local law enforcement agencies to keep immigration officials accountable.
- The national organization Local Progress has recently released a [report](#) that compiles a wide range of municipal actions, including resolutions, enforcement limits, and community protection policies.
- The Local Policy "[No Secret Police-Local Policy Toolkit](#)" offers model policies and messaging strategies focused on transparency and accountability.
- The "[Toolkit: State Power to Protect Immigrant Communities](#)" (Google Docs) provides examples of state-level legal frameworks that may inform or complement municipal action.

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