

PUBLIC AFFAIRS  
POLICY  
BRIEF SERIES

POLICY BRIEF: ESSENTIAL WORKERS FOR ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT ACT

## BROADENING WORKFORCE OPPORTUNITIES IN THE RESTAURANT INDUSTRY

✓ With more than 15.5M workers in over 1M establishments, **the foodservice industry is the nation's second-largest private sector employer.**

✓ **59% of restaurant operators have job openings that are tough to fill**, according to the Association's 2025 State of the Restaurant Industry report.

✓ Additionally, **1/3 of operators say their restaurant does not have enough employees** to support its existing customer demand.

✓ Although there's no silver bullet to solve this challenge, **more people in the workforce are critical to supporting the restaurant industry's and the nation's economic growth.**

**People are the restaurant industry's greatest asset.** Our workforce is more diverse than any other sector in the economy.

Right now, 59% of restaurant operators have job openings that are tough to fill. The Essential Workers for Economic Advancement Act (EWEA) would expand the workforce for occupations that provide growth opportunities without a college degree.

This non-immigrant temporary worker program would help restaurants fill job vacancies and provide employees with valuable training, experience, and a career path.

### HOW DOES THE EWEA PROGRAM WORK?

The EWEA program would connect prospective workers with employers, both of whom must meet participation requirements.

✓ Once the employer has been approved, a prospective EWEA employee would be matched for a specific position and location.

✓ EWEA employees have the ability to move between qualified positions available at EWEA employers and the potential to advance with growth and training.

✓ EWEA employers and employees must participate in employment verification through E-Verify.

✓ EWEA employers must prove that the position has remained unfilled for a set period of time and that no equally or better qualified U.S. worker who applied is ready, willing, and able to fill the position.

### LEARN MORE

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[Restaurant.org](https://www.restaurant.org)

**BROADENING WORKFORCE OPPORTUNITIES  
IN THE RESTAURANT INDUSTRY****HOW DOES THE PROPOSED EWEA PROGRAM COMPARE WITH EXISTING PROGRAMS?**

EWEA Workforce Program	Specialty Occupations Workforce Program
Capacity at 65,000.	Capacity at 65,000.
Could go up to 85,000 (or down to 45,000) through a market-based mechanism.	An additional 20,000 for graduate degree holders from U.S. universities.
Prohibits family members from joining participants in the U.S.	Allows family members to join participants in the U.S.
Authorized to work for an initial 3 years with extensions allowed for up to an additional 6 years.	Authorized to work for an initial 3 years with extensions allowed for a maximum of 3 years.

**WHY THE PROPOSED EWEA PROGRAM WORKS FOR RESTAURANTS**

**The restaurant industry is one of the nation's leading trainers, equipping employees with business acumen, leadership abilities, and communication skills that are highly transferrable and sought by other industries.**

The EWEA program allots 25% of employees for businesses like restaurants that promote nationally recognized employee safety and health programs, hire workers under the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) or have comparatively low sales per employee.

While that figure may appear small, the contributions that employees make will be significant. **EWEA employees will help grow the restaurant industry's economic impact and acquire valuable skills that can be utilized throughout their career.**

**POLICYMAKERS CAN HELP EXPAND WORKFORCE OPPORTUNITIES**

**The restaurant industry urges Congress to advance and pass the Essential Workers for Economic Advancement Act.**

