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## Changes in visa program could deprive Knoxville of valuable talent | Opinion

**Alexia Georghiou** Guest columnist

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### Key Points

- As Knoxville grows, our ability to attract and retain skilled international talent has never been more critical.
- Recent changes in U.S. visa policy are creating stress and instability for workers and employers.
- Without addressing these changes, we risk losing skilled workers to other cities or countries.

As Knoxville continues to grow as a hub for technology, health care and education, our city's ability to attract and retain skilled international talent has never been more critical.

Yet, recent developments in U.S. immigration policy are placing both workers and employers in a state of uncertainty.

The [September 2025 U.S. Visa Bulletin](#) signals a potential freeze in most employment-based green card categories for Indian nationals.

For many of Knoxville's tech workers, nurses, and engineers, this means that long-term residency – once seen as a predictable pathway – is now in question. Family-sponsored categories such as F2A remain open, allowing spouses and children to join their loved ones, but the core workforce faces an uncertain future.

Adding to the complexity is the [proposed overhaul of the H-1B visa program](#), shifting from a lottery system to a wage-based allocation.

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While intended to prioritize higher-paid roles, this change threatens entry-level positions, leaving recent graduates and young professionals at a disadvantage. Knoxville's hospitals, tech startups and universities rely on these individuals to sustain innovation and meet growing labor demands.

The consequences for local employers are clear: Without careful planning, talent gaps may widen. Companies must invest in retention programs, career development, and legal support for international staff. Ignoring these changes risks losing skilled workers to other cities or countries where immigration pathways are more predictable.

For Knoxville's immigrant workers, particularly those with no criminal record and no other barriers to employment, these policies create unnecessary stress and instability. Many have contributed to our economy, community and culture. Treating them as a political or administrative inconvenience undermines the very workforce that drives our city forward.

Ultimately, Knoxville stands at a crossroads. Local leaders, employers and policymakers have an opportunity to support immigrants proactively – through advocacy, mentorship, and inclusive workplace policies. Doing so not only strengthens our city's economy but also reinforces the values of fairness and opportunity that define Tennessee.

We cannot afford to wait while bureaucratic backlogs and policy shifts threaten our skilled workforce. The time for thoughtful, compassionate action is now.

*Alexia Georgiou, Knoxville resident and advocate for workforce equity, is the founder of the Knoxville Happiness Coalition and the author of "The Future of Work is Human and the Future of Success is Happiness."*