

**A CALL FOR COMPASSIONATE AND COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM FROM THE PENNSYLVANIA FAITH COMMUNITY**

April 21, 2006

Dear Member of the Pennsylvania Congressional Delegation:

We, as clergy and laypersons, members of the faith community in Pennsylvania, join together to call upon you to support comprehensive immigration reform legislation that establishes a safe and humane immigration system consistent with our values. Our faith traditions teach us to welcome our brothers and sisters with love and compassion.

The Hebrew Bible/Old Testament tells us: "When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt..." (Leviticus 19:33-34, NRSV). In the New Testament, Jesus tells us to welcome the stranger (cf. Matthew 25:35, NRSV), for "... just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40, NRSV).

We call for compassionate immigration reform because we witness in our communities the human consequences of our existing system. We see and hear the suffering of immigrants who have been exploited in the workplace or abused at the hands of unscrupulous smugglers and traffickers. We encounter immigrants who are afraid to seek police or medical help for fear of being exposed, and families separated for years by our harsh immigration laws. We are alarmed at the lack of compassion reflected in House Resolution 4437, especially as we now find ourselves under attack by those who seek to criminalize undocumented status and prosecute those who provide spiritual support and services to these communities.

While we support the right of the government to enforce the law and protect the national security interests of the United States, we recognize that our existing complex immigration system has made it nearly impossible for many immigrants—most of whom merely seek to support their families or reunite with loved ones—to achieve legal status. Reforming the immigration system to address this reality—more in line with what is being proposed in the Senate Judiciary Committee's immigration reform bill—would allow the U.S. government to focus its enforcement efforts on real threats that face all Americans, citizens and immigrants alike.

We call upon you, as our elected officials, to support reform of the U.S. legal immigration system by enacting legislation that includes the following:

- An opportunity for hard-working immigrants who are already contributing to this country to come out of the shadows, regularize their status upon satisfaction of reasonable criteria and, over time, pursue an option to become lawful permanent residents and eventually United States citizens;
- Reforms in our family-based immigration system to significantly reduce waiting times for separated families who often wait many years to be reunited;

- The creation of legal avenues for workers and their families who wish to migrate to the U.S. to enter our country and work in a safe, legal, and orderly manner with their rights fully protected; and
- Border protection policies that are consistent with humanitarian values and with the need to treat all individuals with dignity and respect.

As people of faith, concerned citizens of the United States, and your constituents, we urge you to support an immigration system that supports families who are divided because of our current system and that recognizes the dignity and rights of every individual, for we are all created in the image of God. It is our collective prayer that you will hear our call to produce a just immigration system that we can hold up as a shining beacon for the world.

Sincerely,

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