

Pennsylvania Interfaith Statement in Support of Comprehensive Immigration Reform

We, the undersigned faith-based leaders and organizations, join together to call upon President Bush and our elected officials in Congress to enact comprehensive immigration reform legislation that establishes a safe and humane immigration system consistent with our values. Our diverse faith traditions teach us to welcome our brothers and sisters with love and compassion.

The Hebrew Bible tells us: "The strangers who sojourn with you shall be to you as the natives among you, and you shall love them as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt (Leviticus 19:33-34)." In the New Testament, Jesus tells us to welcome the stranger (cf. Matthew 25:35), for "what you do to the least of my brethren, you do unto me (Matthew 25:40)." The Qur'an tells us that we should "serve God...and do good to...orphans, those in need, neighbors who are near, neighbors who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer that you meet, [and those who have nothing] (Surah 4:36)."

We call for immigration reform because each day in our congregations, service programs, health-care facilities, and schools we witness the human consequences of an ineffective system. We see and hear the suffering of immigrants who have experienced exploitation in the workplace or abuse at the hands of unscrupulous smugglers and traffickers, we encounter immigrants afraid to seek police or medical help, and families separated for years by our harsh immigration laws. With the passage of House Resolution 4437, 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 and unworkable immigration system has made it nearly impossible for many immigrants - who seek to support their families or reunite with loved ones - to achieve legal status. Reforming the immigration system to address this reality 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 our elected officials to change the U.S. legal immigration system and help put an end to this suffering 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 currently 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 respect, while allowing the authorities to carry out the critical task of identifying and preventing entry of terrorists and dangerous criminals, as well as pursuing the legitimate task of implementing American immigration policy.

As faith-based leaders and organizations, we engage the immigration issue with the goal of fashioning an immigration system that facilitates legal status and family unity in the interest of serving the God-given dignity and rights of every individual. It is our collective prayer that the legislative process will produce a just immigration system of which our Commonwealth and our nation of immigrants can be proud.