



Seeks of the Great Shepherd
**The National
Advocacy Center**

NAC SUPPORTS COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM

From its inception the United States has been a country of immigrants. Over the centuries people from around the world seeking religious freedom and a better way of life have journeyed to the Americas and have found liberty, opportunity and happiness. North America in particular has benefited from newcomers who have brought new energy, hope, and a faith in God that has built a way of life that is the envy of the free world.

Immigration reform has become an issue that cannot be ignored in light of the changes brought to our world after the tragedy of September 11, 2001. Our system is broken and our current immigration policies cannot distinguish between those who come seeking a better way of life and those who wish to harm us. We have also instituted practices that not only contradict the principles on which our country was founded, but also hurt people seeking refuge in the United States.

Many immigrants are forced to make a dangerous and oftentimes fatal journey to provide even the most basic necessities for themselves and their families. Undocumented immigrants are forced to live life in the shadows. They are sometimes abused by employers who promise payment for work but often renege. They earn low wages with no benefits, work hazardous jobs, and have no recourse to redress wrongs that have been perpetrated in the work place.

It is important to look at the facts about immigration before we create laws that spring from untrue assumptions regarding immigration. According to the USCCB's Justice for Immigrants Campaign:

- ❖ During the 1990s, half of all new workers were foreign-born, filling gaps left by native-born workers in both the high-and low-skill ends of the spectrum.
- ❖ The percentage of U.S. population that is foreign-born now stands at 11.5%; in the early 20th century it was 15%.
- ❖ Around 75% of today's immigrants have legal permanent visas; of the 25% that are undocumented, 40% have overstayed temporary (non-immigrant) visas. (Source: Department of Homeland Security)
- ❖ In one estimate, immigrants earn about \$240 billion a year, pay about \$90 billion a year in taxes, and use about \$5 billion in public benefits. In another estimate, immigrant tax payments total \$20 to \$30 billion more than the amount of government services they use.
- ❖ Immigrants pay taxes, in the form of income, property, and sales taxes at the federal and state level. As far as income tax payments go, sources vary in their accounts, but a range of studies find that immigrants pay between \$90 and \$140 billion a year in federal, state, and local taxes.
- ❖ No security expert since September 11th, 2001 has said that restrictive immigration measures would have prevented the terrorist attacks—instead, the key is effective use of good intelligence. Most of the 9/11 hijackers were here on legal visas.

NAC Position

As a ministry of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, the National Advocacy Center is truly saddened that immigrants have been subjected to laws and policies that are contrary to the principles this great country was founded upon. These ideals are beautifully articulated in Emma Lazarus' words inscribed on the base of the Statue of Liberty; "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses, yearning to breath free." These ideals are embodied in the Good Shepherd charism, which has led Good Shepherd Sisters to sponsor programs and social services, in Tennessee, Georgia, Illinois, and California that have helped new Americans adjust to their lives in this country. These programs have taught English classes, living skills, and job training to immigrants. St. Mary Euphrasia, the founder of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, said "I no longer want to be called French! I am Italian, English, German, Spanish, American, African, Indian ... I belong to every country...". She affirmed the rights of people to seek their own destiny in the great cosmos.

Drawing from this experience and heritage, the National Advocacy Center supports comprehensive and compassionate immigration legislation and rejects enforcement-only approaches, such as the legislation passed by the House, H.R. 4437. While we are concerned about some of the provisions in the Senate bill, we believe the comprehensive approach in S. 2611 is a strong step forward in immigration reform. The National Advocacy Center maintains that any final agreement on immigration reform must be comprehensive and include:

- ❖ Border security that protects the dignity of individuals and allows authorities to prevent terrorists and dangerous criminals from entering the U.S. without further militarizing the border;
- ❖ A guest worker program that addresses the future flow of immigrants and enables migrants with job offers to enter the U.S. legally, have full labor protections, and eventually apply for citizenship;
- ❖ An eventual avenue to legalization for most undocumented immigrants living and working in the U.S. (including special provisions for those who were brought here as children);
- ❖ An improved family unification system that will reduce the delays experienced by immigrants seeking to rejoin their close family members in the U.S.

We are further troubled by the plight of young people who were brought to this country as young children and have grown up "American" yet find themselves unable to access a higher education or attain citizenship because of their immigration status. Immigrant children and youth cannot be held liable for an immigration status that resulted from their parents' actions and the federal government should not punish them by denying the opportunity to adjust their status and seek higher education. Therefore, we also support the Development, Relief & Education for Alien Minors act (DREAM Act), included in S. 2611, and the American Dream Act, introduced in the House in April of 2006.

Catholic teaching has a long and rich tradition in defending the right to migrate. Based on the life and teachings of Jesus, the Church's teaching has provided the basis for the development of basic principles regarding the right to migrate for those attempting to exercise their God-given human rights. Catholic teaching also states that the root causes of migration—poverty, injustice, religious intolerance, and armed conflicts—must be addressed so that migrants can remain in their homeland and support their families. (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops – Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope)