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Statement by AFLCIO President John Sweeney On Introduction of Cornyn and Kyl Comprehensive Enforcement and Immigration Reform Act July 20, 2005

The Comprehensive Enforcement and Immigration Reform Act (CEIR) introduced this week by Senators John Cornyn of Texas and Jon Kyl of Arizona would be a disaster for immigrant working families and for our communities. CEIR will keep families divided, facilitate the exploitation of vulnerable guest workers and drive the close to 11 million undocumented immigrants already living and working in this country further into the shadows. The result will surely be the lowering of wage and workplace protections for all workers. The Cornyn-Kyl approach to immigration reform will push an already crisis situation over the edge.

The foundation of any reform of our immigration laws must begin with a broad legalization plan that allows undocumented workers and their families who have been working hard, paying taxes and contributing to their communities with the opportunity to adjust to a legal status.

The CEIR act would require that the millions of undocumented immigrants who are currently in the United States pay a hefty fine and leave within five years of the law's enactment. The bill would not offer any remedy for families torn apart by restrictive immigration laws –this proposal would simply offer family members of workers a 30 day visitation visa. Finally, this bill would enact an uncapped guest worker program with insufficient worker protections that offers no path to permanent resident status or citizenship.

The history of guest worker programs in this country has demonstrated that even when minimal standards for pay, housing and other requirements exist, employers violate them with impunity. Employers often prefer guest workers because they will work to the limits of human endurance for low wages.. When a segment of workers is denied the right to compete and demand just wages and workplace protections, all workers lose.

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