

INTERFAITH IMMIGRATION COALITION

Interfaith Immigration Coalition Members

African American Ministers in Action
American Baptist Churches, USA
American Baptist Home Mission Societies
American Friends Service Committee
American Jewish Committee
Bread for the World
Church World Service
Columban Center for Advocacy & Outreach
Disciples Justice Action Network
(Disciples of Christ)
The Episcopal Church
Franciscan Action Network
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society
Interfaith Worker Justice
Irish Apostolate USA
Islamic Information Center
Jesuit Refugee Service
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Leadership Conference of Women Religious
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Mennonite Central Committee U.S.
Washington Office
Muslim Public Affairs Council
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of
the Good Shepherd
NETWORK, A Catholic Social Justice Lobby
Pax Christi USA
PICO National Network
Presbyterian Church USA, Immigration
Issues Offices
Union for Reform Judaism
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas
Sojourners
3P Human Security
Unitarian Universalist Association of
Congregations
United Church of Christ, Justice and
Witness Ministries
United Methodist Church, General Board of
Church and Society
UNITED SIKHS
World Relief

The Interfaith Immigration Coalition (IIC), a coalition of 35 national faith-based organizations, calls on the 113th Congress to reform of our broken immigration system. For more than a decade, the IIC has been working with hundreds of congregations, service providers, and faith leaders across the country to educate communities, oppose anti-immigrant legislation, and work toward humane immigration reform. In the past four years alone, the IIC network has organized more than a thousand prayer vigils, community forums, and rallies across the country in support of immigrants' rights. As a diverse coalition, we see this as an opportunity to raise issues that should be considered as Congress moves forward with fixing our nation's broken immigration system. The IIC calls on Congress to enact legislation that will:

Address the Causes of Migration

People of faith have witnessed firsthand the suffering caused by extreme poverty, violent conflict, political and religious persecution, and environmental destruction that prompt individuals to leave their homes in search of a better life. U.S. foreign policy must seek smart, effective ways to help reshape financial systems that unduly burden vulnerable populations – including U.S. trade policies, international financial institutions, and local economies in sending countries – toward models that support those in need.

Our faiths compel us to seek to reduce the need for people to leave their homes in order to provide for their families. Rather than current policies which undermine sustainable livelihoods in sending countries, we should invest in environmentally sustainable economic development that preserves and defends the basic human rights of all people. These policies will provide alternatives to unauthorized immigration and reduce the need for costly border enforcement, detention, and deportation.

Create a Process for Undocumented Immigrants to Earn Citizenship

Any meaningful reform of our immigration system must include a fair and generous process that allows undocumented immigrants and their families to earn lawful permanent residency with a pathway to citizenship. The workability of such a program should not be hindered by overly punitive criteria, such as mandating that immigrants leave the country or pay exorbitant fees, or by making the process conditional upon the implementation of enforcement measures. We urge members of Congress to oppose legislation that would curtail the nature of citizenship or restrict access to public benefits and child tax credits.

Keep Families Together

Families are the basic unit of strong communities. Today, thousands of families are separated by our broken immigration system and should be reunited. Backlogs at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and the limited number of visas force family members to choose between being separated for extended periods of time or illegally entering the country. A fair immigration system must improve and strengthen the family immigration process by recapturing visas lost to bureaucratic delay to reduce the current backlog; reclassifying spouses and minor children of lawful permanent residents as immediate relatives; raising the per country visa limits from seven to fifteen percent of total admissions to reduce long wait times for certain nationalities; eliminating unlawful presence bars for the spouse, child, or parent of U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents; admitting surviving family members of deceased family petitioners; and eliminating the cap on the total number of family-based visas available.

Enact the *Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act*

The faith community sees the DREAM Act as vital in fixing the broken immigration system. The DREAM Act has had many iterations, and the IIC calls

on Congress to enact robust and inclusive legislation that would provide a pathway to citizenship for individuals brought to the United States at age 16 or younger, are currently no older than 35 years of age, and who have graduated from high school, earned a GED in the U.S, or are currently in school. In addition to college and military service criteria, the IIC urges legislators to include volunteer service as a method by which DREAMers can maintain legal status and earn citizenship. DACA recipients should automatically qualify for any legalization process, and their time with DACA status should count toward any conditional status period under the DREAM Act.

Protect Workers' Rights, Including Agricultural Workers

There is a clear need to expand legal avenues for workers to migrate to the United States in a safe, authorized, and orderly manner. It is vital that these workers' rights are fully protected, including the right to bring their families with them, travel as needed, change their place of employment, and apply for lawful permanent residency and eventually citizenship.

Enactment of AgJobs (the *Agricultural Job Opportunities, Benefits and Security Act*) would provide a legal, stable labor force by offering undocumented farmworkers the chance to earn legal status by meeting stringent work requirements and legal obligations. AgJobs would revise the H-2A agricultural guest-worker program to help employers fill critical agricultural positions that have been difficult to fill, sustaining agricultural industries while also protecting workers' rights.

As currently structured, the electronic employment verification (E-verify) program has proven detrimental to migrants, employers, and citizen employees. It leads to increased discrimination and unfair hiring and firing practices. For these reasons, and because we believe all workers benefit from the enforcement of health, safety, wage, and hour laws, as well as the right to peacefully organize, the IIC is opposed to the mandatory expansion of the E-verify program.

Place Humanitarian Values at the Center of Enforcement Policies

Enforcement policies must be made to be consistent with humanitarian values and with the need to treat all individuals with respect, while allowing the United States to identify and prevent the entry of persons who commit dangerous crimes. Over the past twenty years, the federal government has dramatically increased border fence and other infrastructure construction, border patrol presence, immigration detention, and the deportation of immigrants, without regard to cost or effectiveness. Over \$10 billion of taxpayers' money has been spent on border security. It is now time to reform the broken immigration system. To truly decrease unauthorized immigration, the United States should improve access to a fair and humane legal immigration system, increasing and improving the efficiency of ports of entry, expanding visa availability, and eliminating application backlogs.

Border security has also proven to be environmentally irresponsible on many levels. It threatens already endangered species and damages public lands and interferes with business and land owners who operate and live along the border. We have also witnessed the desecration of sacred sites and the violation of religious freedom, as well as the unnecessary anguish of community members whose loved ones have suffered or died seeking entry into the United States. Above all else, enforcement policies must treat all individuals with respect and dignity. Citizens and migrants alike have the right to a fair and humane legal immigration system that respects the dignity of all persons, prioritizes the cohesiveness of families and communities, recognizes the economic contributions of immigrants, and upholds our moral obligations to provide refuge and welcome for the sojourner.

Protect Refugees and Migrant Survivors of Violence

The IIC encourages Congress to make life-changing improvements to the U.S. refugee resettlement program that would help refugees integrate in their new homes in the United States. Refugees have fled persecution in their home countries due to their race, nationality, religion, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group, and the United States has a rich tradition of welcoming refugees and helping them begin new lives. Bills such as the *Refugee Protection Act*, *Domestic Refugee Resettlement and Modernization Act*, and *Strengthening Refugee Resettlement Act* include positive reforms that would not only help refugees, but provide important resources to the communities that welcome them.

The *Violence Against Women Act* (VAWA) has a long history of uniting lawmakers with the common purpose of protecting survivors of domestic violence. Congress has consistently recognized the vulnerability of non-citizen survivors of violence by enacting provisions in VAWA that enhance safety for survivors and their children and provide tools for law enforcement to investigate and prosecute crimes. In 2012, the House of Representatives passed a VAWA reauthorization bill that would undermine years of protections for immigrant victims and would actually make immigrants more vulnerable, endangering many lives. The IIC urges that any reauthorization of VAWA maintain and improve protections for migrant survivors, not weaken them.