



Franciscan Action Network

Transforming the World in the Spirit of St. Francis and St. Clare

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FAN STATEMENT ON FAMILY UNITY

Franciscan Action Network strongly supports the position of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Interfaith Immigration Coalition that family unification is an essential component of common sense, humane immigration reform. Families are the basic unity of communities, and thus of a strong United States society.

Many of our members have witnessed the devastating impact that family separation, through detention and deportation, have had on immigrant families. Backlogs at USCIS and limited number of visas force family members to make a terrible choice between being separated for an extended period of time, stretching into many years, or illegally entering the country. Families being torn apart will not fix our immigration system.

We support changes which would expedite family reunification, including increasing per country caps to 15 per cent to reduce long waiting times, and eliminating the cap on number of family visas available. Family based visas are not in competition with skilled worker visas. Increase the number of worker visas rather than jeopardize a family based system.

Immigration reform must be fair and compassionate. A country has the right to protect its borders, but we urge members of Congress to acknowledge the fact that our southern border is more secure than it has ever been, with as much as \$150 billion spent in the past ten years on border enforcement. For details on enforcement, we refer members of Congress to the 2013 report of the Migration Policy Institute, “Immigration Enforcement in the United States: The Rise of a Formidable Machinery.”

We are encouraged by work underway in the Congress to finally construct a workable, just and humane immigration system. It is critical that immigration reform does not punish families, but rather honors the values of hard work, perseverance and family unity.

Sister Marie Lucey, OSF
Director of Advocacy
Franciscan Action Network



U.S. Jesuit Conference: Family Unity Must be Prioritized in Immigration Reform Bill

“The U.S. Jesuit Conference commends Congress and the Obama Administration on making immigration reform a priority. We urge elected officials to move from the rhetoric of ‘America as a land of family values’ to the reality of a nation that enacts just immigration laws that protect and reunite families. The social and economic costs of separating children from their parents and incarcerating caregivers and wage earners grow higher each year. We, as Jesuits, because of our commitment to educating the children of migrants in our schools, serving migrant communities in our parishes, and offering deported men, women and children food and shelter on the border, see firsthand the costs of our current immigration laws. Therefore, the Jesuit Conference urges Congress to right size its family visa allocation and abolish 3 and 10 year bars which prolong family reunification and destroy familial bonds.”

- Rev. Thomas P. Greene, SJ, Secretary for Social and International Ministries, Jesuit Conference of the United States

U.S. Jesuit Network Welcomes Bi-Partisan Action for Immigration Reform, Cautions Congress to Define “Border Security” in Way that Protects Human Dignity of Migrants

The U.S. Jesuit Conference, the Jesuit Refugee Service/USA and the Kino Border Initiative welcome the framework for comprehensive immigration reform released yesterday by a bi-partisan group of Senators. Likewise, we were encouraged by President Obama’s remarks in Las Vegas, Nevada today calling for a “commonsense” approach to swiftly address an “out-of-date and badly broken immigration system.”

Through our ministries, on a daily basis we witness the tragic consequences of our nation’s flawed and outdated immigration laws and policies. We can and must do better. As our elected officials attempt to craft a viable immigration system, we urge them to place family unity, human dignity, transparency and accountability at the center of their debates. Very Rev. Thomas H. Smolich, S.J., President of the Jesuit Conference of the United States stressed, “We assess each immigration policy proposal by whether it adheres to the Catholic and American value of promoting and affirming human dignity.” As was established by the Justice for Immigrants campaign of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and reiterated by the U.S. Jesuit Provincials in their joint letter to Congress in June 2010, a comprehensive and humane approach to immigration reform must:

- Establish a pathway to citizenship that ensures that undocumented immigrants have access to full rights;
- Expedite family reunification and emphasize family unity for all immigrants;
- Restore due process, accountability, and transparency, particularly in the context of detention and deportation processes to foster humane enforcement of our immigration policies;
- Include policies that address the root causes of migration from developing countries; and

- Create a legal employment structure for future workers that protects both migrants and the U.S. citizen labor force.

While we are encouraged by the bipartisan tone of yesterday's release and its call for a pathway to citizenship for undocumented individuals, we are concerned that earned legalization in the plan is contingent upon a "secure border." We caution that the concept of achieving an impervious border *before* implementing legalization will leave millions of lives in limbo and prolong indefinitely the irregular status of our undocumented brothers and sisters. A genuine understanding of the realities faced by border communities will yield the best policy. We contend that our borders are best secured and our communities best kept safe by humane, transparent, and accountable practices which foster trust between border communities and law enforcement entities. Said Rev. Sean Carroll, S.J., Executive Director of the bi-national Kino Border Initiative in Nogales, Arizona, "Law enforcement agencies like CBP and ICE must take local community input into account for true security and respect for human rights to become a reality along the U.S./Mexico border."

We look forward to working with lawmakers as they develop legislation that meets the need for comprehensive and humane immigration reform.



A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

Statement on Family Reunification and Family-Based Visas

Sister Simone Campbell, NETWORK Executive Director

*Statement for the Congressional Record relating to the
House Judiciary Committee Hearing on Tuesday, February 5, 2013*

NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby, has long advocated for commonsense, humane immigration reform because the current shattered system does not reflect the compassion of our nation or Gospel values. Catholic Social Teaching and Scripture teach us that each person has a right to be treated with dignity, and that any system that is deliberately cruel or inhumane needs to change.

One of the cruelest aspects of our immigration system is that human suffering results from an inability to foster family unity. Unified families bring stability to individual households while they strengthen neighborhoods and communities. Family members encourage one another to learn English, create stable housing, find gainful employment, etc.

Family-based visas are a critical component of a fair system, and any attempt to lower the number of these visas in order to increase those that are employment-based must be roundly defeated. Instead, the employment issue should be addressed by simply increasing the overall number of visas available to workers.

Limiting family-based visas will not erase the natural, human longing of family members to be together. Instead, it will encourage risky, illegal activities so that children can be with their parents and spouses with one another.

Our nation and neighborhoods are healthier and stronger when building blocks such as family unity are promoted. We call on Congress to maintain or increase the numbers of family-based visas and to quickly address the backlog of applications that keep families apart.

**Church World Service statement for the Congressional Record pertaining to the
House Judiciary Committee Hearing on Tuesday, February 5th, 2013**

As a 67 year old humanitarian organization, Church World Service welcomes newcomers by helping them integrate into their new communities. Our member denominations and refugee resettlement offices know first-hand the impact that our broken immigration system has had on communities. It is from this lens that we approach immigration policy issues, including today's hearing, "America's Immigration System: Opportunities for Legal Immigration and Enforcement of Laws Against Illegal Immigration."

For decades, the United States has increased border and interior enforcement efforts. Last year alone, the U.S. spent more than \$18 billion on immigration enforcement, more than all other federal law enforcement agencies combined.¹ However, border militarization and fence construction, workplace and home invasion raids, utilizing local police to enforce immigration laws, and inhumane detention, coupled with congress's failure to enact real solutions, have only further damaged an already broken system.

To truly fix the immigration system, we must recognize and respond to the reasons why this country needs immigrants, and the reasons why people want to immigrate to the United States. There are two key factors that benefit the United States and simultaneously improve the lives of immigrants: family unity and economic opportunity. These are inseparable and co-joined factors that cannot exist without one another.

Immigrant-owned companies contribute more than \$775 billion dollars annually to U.S. gross domestic product, creating jobs that are essential to economic growth.² Family unity is integral to the economic contribution of immigrants, and also key to the function of our immigration system. When families are separated by lengthy visa backlogs, bars to re-entry, and no option to adjust their status, our immigration system, by failing to function in a timely way, incentivizes illegal entry. What mother or father would not go to the ends of the earth – or in this case cross a border – to reunite with their children? Any immigration system that ignores the deep, God-given desire to be united with family renders itself ineffective.

Our current visa system only allows U.S. citizens to sponsor their spouse, children, parents, and siblings; and Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs) can only sponsor their spouse and children. In addition, visa backlogs can be as long as seven years for a spouse or minor child of LPRs, and as long as 27 years for a sibling of a U.S. citizen. Under these constraints, the notion of 'chain migration' is a myth. CWS opposes any attempt to reduce family visas or put them in competition with other visas.

Measures that prevent family unity slow and clog the immigration system and negatively impact the economy. In contrast, family unity spurs integration, as families provide strong foundations for learning English, purchasing a home, pursuing job opportunities, starting a business, preparing children for college, and contributing to communities. When families are together, the money they earn fuels the U.S. economy through taxes, investments, and the purchasing of goods and services.

CWS is committed to working with all members of the House and Senate to enact immigration reform that will keep families together and provide a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. Such reform would mark real progress. We need to make our immigration system work better for our economy and for the fabric of our communities – families. We urge all members of the House Judiciary Committee to strive toward this goal.

¹ *Immigration Enforcement in the United States: The Rise of a Formidable Machinery*. The Migration Policy Institute. <<http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/enforcementpillars.pdf>>.

² *Open for Business*. The Partnership for a New American Economy. <<http://www.renewoureconomy.org/sites/all/themes/pnae/openforbusiness.pdf>>.

General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church
Statement for the Congressional Record for the
House Judiciary Committee Hearing
Tuesday, February 5th, 2013

The General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church has long advocated for just and humane immigration reform that provides a pathway to full citizenship for undocumented immigrants and reunifies families separated by migration. United Methodists have witnessed the brokenness of the current immigration system firsthand. United Methodists serve immigrant communities through such ministries as Justice for Our Neighbors, which provides free legal counsel for low-income immigrants. Many United Methodist churches are located in immigrant communities and led by immigrants. Therefore, we advocate for policies that will uphold the basic dignity of all immigrants and protect their civil and human rights.

The United Methodist Church believes that “at the center of Christian faithfulness to Scripture is the call we have been given to love and welcome the sojourner...to refuse to welcome migrants to this country and to stand by in silence while families are separated, individual freedoms are ignored, and the migrant community in the United States is demonized...is complicity to sin.” (“Welcoming the Migrant to the U.S.”, 2008 *Book of Resolutions*)

The time for humane reform is now. For far too long, the United States has continually increased border and interior enforcement efforts. Last year alone, the U.S. spent more than \$18 billion on immigration enforcement, more than all other federal law enforcement agencies combined.³ After billions of dollars spent on enforcement, workplace and home invasion raids that resulted in more than a million immigrants deported during the Obama Administration alone, including 100,000 parents of U.S. citizen children, utilizing local police as immigration enforcement officials, and inhumane and indefinite detention, it is indeed far past time for Congress to enact legislative reform that protects the rights of immigrants and preserves the integrity of immigrant families.

What is true throughout Scripture remains true today: families are the cornerstone of a strong and growing society. Family stability strengthens individuals, neighborhoods, and entire communities. It is through families that individuals learn basic skills to flourish in life, and importantly, that they gain their values and morality. Family unity is the primary way individuals integrate into the larger society. Families provide strong foundations for learning English, purchasing a home, pursuing job opportunities, starting a business, preparing children for college, and contributing to communities. When families are together, the money they earn fuels the U.S. economy through taxes, investments, and the purchasing of goods and services. Therefore, any reform to the immigration system must make family unity its cornerstone.

Policies that prevent family unity only further damage the immigration system and negatively impact the economy. Under the current visa system, only U.S. citizens are allowed to sponsor their spouse, children, parents, and siblings; and Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs) can only

³ *Immigration Enforcement in the United States: The Rise of a Formidable Machinery*. The Migration Policy Institute. <<http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/enforcementpillars.pdf>>.

sponsor their spouse and children. In addition, visa backlogs can be as long as seven years for a spouse or minor child of LPRs, and as long as 27 years for a sibling of a U.S. citizen. Under these constraints, the notion of 'chain migration' is a myth. Therefore, we vigorously oppose any attempt to reduce family visas or put them in competition with other types of visas.

United Methodists across the country stand ready to work with all members of the House and Senate to enact immigration reform that will keep families together and provide a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. We need reform that is humane and effective and we urge all members of the House Judiciary Committee to strive toward this goal.

THE
Episcopal
CHURCH

**TESTIMONY ON OF ALEXANDER D. BAUMGARTEN AND KATIE CONWAY ON
BEHALF OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH⁴**

FEBRUARY 5, 2013

We thank Representative Goodlatte, Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, and Ranking Member Conyers for the opportunity to submit this testimony. We welcome this timely hearing, “America’s Immigration System: Opportunities for Legal Immigration and Enforcement of Laws against Illegal Immigration” and wish to express our support for maintaining the family visa system as a cornerstone of our legal immigration system.

The Episcopal Church’s highest governing body, the General Convention, has passed multiple resolutions affirming the rights of all families to reunify without undue delay, including the families of same-sex partners and spouses. These calls are rooted in our understanding of the Christian imperative to “welcome the stranger,” and the experience of our Church’s decades of work with migrant communities. Keeping families apart through per-country caps, redistributing family visas to the employment system, or failing to recognize the immigration claims of same-sex partners harms the U.S. economy, fractures our communities, and denies the socio-economic necessity of family. The family immigration system and the employment system should be viewed as complimentary pieces of a holistic immigration system rather than as separate systems in competition with one another.

We believe that families create healthy individuals and serve as the foundation for strong communities. Family members help one another to other integrate, pursue job opportunities, start their own businesses, and contribute economically, socially and spiritually to our communities. Under current immigration law, however, millions of families are forced to wait decades to reunify and some even face permanent separation. This forces families to make impossible choices between our immigration laws and the people they love.

Our Church recognizes the importance of adhering to our nation’s laws, but we believe we must work change laws if they do not respect the dignity of human beings or respond to the needs of communities. This call to right relationship within human communities is a cornerstone of the Judeo-Christian scriptural and ethical tradition, and finds expression for Episcopalians in the promise each makes at baptism to “strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being.” Our immigration system must be transformed to into a just and humane system that discerns between those who enter illegally to do us harm and those who enter because our system cannot provide them with a clear and timely path to family reunification or legal employment. Destructive enforcement programs like Secure Communities

⁴ Alexander D. Baumgarten is the Director of Government Relations, and Katie Conway is the Immigration and Refugee Policy Analyst for the Episcopal Church, a multinational religious denomination based in the United States with members in 15 other sovereign.

should be terminated and the immigrant workers upon whom much of our economy depends should be allowed to sponsor their families.

Thank you for carrying the costly burden of public service, and for the opportunity to submit these views to the Subcommittee.

Respectfully submitted,
Alexander D. Baumgarten and Katie Conway

Statement in Support of Family-Based Immigration
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
Sister Gayle Lwanga, RGS
February 5, 2013

The Sisters of the Good Shepherd form one international congregation ministering in 71 countries on five continents. In the United States, the Sisters are spread from east to west in 23 states and also are in Canada. Founded over two hundred years ago in Angers, France, by St. Mary Euphrasia who believed that God is like a compassionate Shepherd whose love for all is boundless, Good Shepherd Sisters respond to a call to reach out to everyone and help awaken in all peoples a sense of each one's unique worth and inestimable value.

As a religious community we believe the unique worth of each individual extends to all immigrants, both documented and undocumented. Seeking to build a more just and compassionate society, we urge members of Congress to give priority to family unity when they are creating immigration policy.

The worse human suffering is being separated from the person you love. This suffering is even more so when it is separation from your mother or father, your daughter or son, your wife or husband

The Catholic Church has consistently taught the importance and the sacredness of the family. Without the presence of a secure and loving family, we cannot be emotionally nourished and develop into loving and socially responsible adults.

Please create legislation that assures that families will not be separated. Also, enact legislation that will ensure that the hundreds of immigrant families who have been separated for many years will be quickly reunited.



**Leadership Conference of Women Religious Statement on
Importance of Family Unity in Immigration Reform
Sister Janet Mock, CSJ, Executive Director**

As women of faith we, the members of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), take seriously the gospel call to welcome the stranger and care for those in need. As Catholic sisters we are committed to the precepts of Catholic Social Teaching rooted in the Catholic tradition that remind us that the dignity of the person is at the core of our moral vision of society; that how we organize our society affects human dignity directly; and that any system that is deliberately cruel or inhumane needs to change. Because of these beliefs, at our 2012 national assembly, LCWR, “called on Congress to pass comprehensive immigration reform that includes the reunification of families and a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants living in the United States.”

Catholic sisters began coming to these shores 286 years ago as immigrants to serve immigrant populations. To this day they continue to minister to these aspiring citizens in schools and hospitals, in the fields and in the cities. They see the devastating effects of the brokenness of the current immigration system every day. They share the pain of mothers separated from their children and fathers who have risked their lives for love of their families.

The Senate framework and the principles laid out in the President’s speech in Las Vegas provide hope to our immigrant brothers and sisters and promise that the values that are the bedrock of our national identity will flourish—family unity, equal opportunity, due process, and respect for the dignity of all God’s children.

Today our broken immigration system too often splits families, separates spouses, and keeps parents from their children. Our nation needs, and our people deserve, immigration reform that reflects the paramount importance and socio-economic necessity of family unity; reform that does not pit one group of aspiring Americans against another. We need not sacrifice family unity to meet the needs of business and workers. We can and must protect families’ and workers’ rights.

Families are the very building blocks of our society. If given access to what is needed to live in healthy ways, it is in our families that we first experience the love of God. It is in our families that we learn to care for one another. It is in our families that we come to know that each of us can and must contribute to the common good and work with our neighbors to build a community where all can flourish.

We have the opportunity to honor parents who have sacrificed their own safety and risked their lives for the future of their children. We have the opportunity to reunite mothers with their sons

and fathers with their daughters. If we fail to act we not only place the well-being of our mothers and fathers and children at risk, we threaten the heart and soul of our nation.

We look forward to working with lawmakers as they develop legislation that expedites the reunification of families, preserves family-based visa categories, reduces current backlogs, and provides humanitarian consideration for families.

LCWR is an association of leaders of congregations of Catholic sisters in the United States. The conference has nearly 1500 members, who represent more than 80 percent of the 57,000 women religious in the United States. Founded in 1956, the conference assists its members to collaboratively carry out their service of leadership to further the mission of the Gospel in today's world.



Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

LIRS Statement for Hearing: “America’s Immigration System: Opportunities for Legal Immigration and Enforcement of Laws Against Illegal Immigration”

House Judiciary Committee

February 5, 2013

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS), the national agency established by Lutheran churches in the United States to serve uprooted people, is pleased by Congressional and Administrative efforts to draft and enact comprehensive immigration reform. People of faith have long called for an immigration system that prioritizes family unity and is grounded in humanitarian principles.

As this committee and others begin work on immigration reform legislation, LIRS offers our support for legislation adhering to the following five principles for reform:

- Providing an earned pathway to lawful permanent residency and eventual citizenship for undocumented immigrants and their families.
- Ensuring the humane and just enforcement of U.S. immigration laws, specifically by reducing the use of immigration detention and expanding the use of community support programs for immigrants who do not need to be detained.
- Protecting families from separation and ensure an adequate supply of visas for families seeking to reunite.
- Providing adequate resources and protections to ensure the successful integration of refugees, asylees, survivors of torture and trafficking, unaccompanied minors, and other vulnerable migrants.
- Ensuring the protection of U.S. citizen and migrant workers.

Family-Based Immigration System

LIRS strongly believes that a reformed immigration system must improve family unity. Family is the cornerstone of our faith and the grounding structure of our society. Comprehensive immigration reform must uphold the importance of families to our congregations and communities by including meaningful reforms to the family-based immigration system.

LIRS and Lutherans all over America wholeheartedly agree on the need for an improvement of the immigration process for families. The current family visa system forces too many families to endure years of separation from their loved ones. For some families who filed a visa petition before June 1, 1989, backlogs have forced them to wait over 23 years to begin the application process.⁵ They will finally be able to do so in February 2013. Any reform of our immigration system must reduce these backlogs and improve mechanisms for family members to reunite with relatives in the United States.

⁵ *Visa Bulletin*, Department of State, http://travel.state.gov/visa/bulletin/bulletin_5856.html (February 2013).

LIRS and Lutherans all across this country will be lifting up our voices and engaging lawmakers from both parties to answer the president's call for fair and compassionate immigration reform that is both business and family friendly," said LIRS President and CEO Linda Hartke.

Immigration Enforcement

As Congress has deliberated on how to reform America's immigration laws for decades, enforcement of current laws has exponentially expanded. When adjusted for inflation, the government spends 15 times as much on immigration enforcement today (\$17.9 billion) as it did in 1986 (\$1.2 billion).⁶

Since the last serious debate on immigration reform in 2007, the budget for Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) detention and removal operations has grown from \$1.984 billion to \$2.75 billion.^{7,8} In fiscal year (FY) 2011, ICE detained an all-time high number of persons- 429,000.⁹ In FY 2012, 409,849 individuals were removed by ICE's Office of Enforcement and Removal Operations¹⁰.

The numbers bear witness to the fact that enforcement of our immigration laws is happening at an unprecedented and incredible pace. Through LIRS's programmatic work, we have witnessed firsthand the detrimental effects immigration enforcement measures, such as immigration detention, have on individuals, families, and communities.

Isatu Jollah, grew up in Sierra Leone during the country's civil war.¹¹ When she was twelve years old, Isatu was raped by rebel soldiers and separated from her mother. Isatu later suffered female genital mutilation (FGM) and was severely punished when she refused to perform the practice on other young women. Isatu fled to the United States where upon expressing her intention to apply for asylum at the airport she was detained in York County Prison (PA). While in detention, Isatu was denied medical care for complications relating to FGM. When post-traumatic stress disorder caused her attacks of anxiety she was isolated in solitary confinement.

Despite being an expensive and inhumane way to ensure appearance at immigration court proceedings, the growth of immigration detention has been steep and continual. The United States currently spends approximately 24% more money on immigration enforcement activities than on all other federal law enforcement programs combined.¹²

⁶ *Immigration Enforcement in the United States: The Rise of a Formidable Machinery*, Migration Policy Institute, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/enforcementpillars.pdf> (January 2013).

⁷ *Unlocking Liberty: A Way Forward for U.S. Immigration Detention Policy*, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service www.lirs.org/dignity (October 2011).

⁸ *Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2012*, PL 122-74 <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-112publ74/html/PLAW-112publ74.htm> (Dec. 23, 2011).

⁹ *Immigration Enforcement Actions: 2011*, Office of Immigration Statistics, Policy Directorate, http://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/immigration-statistics/enforcement_ar_2011.pdf (Sept. 2012)

¹⁰ *FY 2012: ICE announces year-end removal numbers, highlights focus on key priorities and issues new national detainer guidance to further focus resources*, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, <http://www.ice.gov/news/releases/1212/121221washingtondc2.htm> (Dec. 2012).

¹¹ *Broken Promises: Seeking Political Asylum in America*, Ladies Home Journal, <http://www.lhj.com/health/news/seeking-political-asylum-in-america/?page=1> (Feb. 2010).

¹² *Immigration Enforcement in the United States: The Rise of a Formidable Machinery*, Migration Policy Institute <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/enforcementpillars.pdf> (January 2013).

To detain a woman like Isatu for one day costs U.S. taxpayers an average of \$164.¹³ LIRS supports increased use of alternatives to detention, which range in cost from a few cents a day to an average of \$22 a day and allow migrants to reunite with family members and contribute to their communities while undergoing immigration proceedings.¹⁴ Isatu was eventually released from detention with a tracking device as part of an alternatives to detention program. Appearance rates in immigration proceedings for those released on alternatives to detention average over 90%, making these options a practical, humane, and economical alternative to detention.¹⁵ Any reform of our immigration system must include protections against arbitrary detention and safeguards to ensure enforcement is carried out in a fair, humane, and economically sound manner.

LIRS is nationally recognized for its leadership advocating on behalf of refugees, asylum seekers, unaccompanied children, immigrants in detention, families fractured by migration and other vulnerable populations, and for providing services to migrants through over 60 grassroots legal and social service partners across the United States.

If you have any question about this statement, please contact Brittney Nystrom, Director for Advocacy, at (202) 626-7943 or via email at bnystrom@lirs.org.

Additional LIRS Resources

- The January 29, 2013 press release on President Obama's speech outlining a vision for immigration reform may be read here: www.bit.ly/VxQHYW
- The January 28, 2013 press release on the release of the bipartisan principles for immigration reform in the Senate may be read here: www.bit.ly/WhPPX2
- LIRS's FAQ's on the Family Immigration System may be read here: www.bit.ly/11Jqt2Z
- The December 15, 2011 press release expressing concerns with increased FY 2012 immigration detention spending may be read here: www.bit.ly/XoeHtA
- The October 2011 report, *Unlocking Liberty: A Way Forward for U.S. Immigration Detention Policy*, may be read here: www.bit.ly/VwrNFE

¹³ *The Math of Immigration Detention*, National Immigration Forum, <http://www.immigrationforum.org/images/uploads/MathofImmigrationDetention.pdf> (August 2012).

¹⁴ *Unlocking Liberty: A Way Forward for U.S. Immigration Detention Policy*, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service www.lirs.org/dignity (October 2011).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

**Statement in Support of Family Based Immigration
from Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Refugee & Immigration Ministries**

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is an immigrant denomination of approximately 700,000 members and 3,500 congregations. Born from a movement on the American frontier, it was founded on the principles that all are welcome at the Table of Christ, and includes a large number of congregations with first generation Americans. Throughout our history, Disciples have had specific ministries of welcome to immigrants coming to the United States and Canada, which have been carried out by congregations, regions, and general ministries.

As a denomination, we recognize that immigration has played a major role in the development of our countries and in the advancement of our economies, and we recognize the strength of the United States emerges from the diversity of its immigrants. Repeatedly, our General Assemblies have called upon Disciples members and ministries to reflect from a faith perspective and with intentionality on current immigration issues and to “advocate immigration reform legislation that is just, humane and compassionate” (resolution on “Faith and Our New Neighbors,” 2007.) This includes support at this time for immigration reform that prioritizes family unity and creates a pathway to full citizenship.

President of Disciples Home Missions, Rev. Dr. Ronald J. Degges, comments that “As Christians committed to God’s call to welcome the stranger and to promote the wholeness and well being of families, Disciples leaders and governing bodies have for years called upon our political leaders to move beyond our current system that demonizes our neighbors, divides us against one another, and devastates children by tearing apart their families. We therefore welcome an opportunity to achieve immigration reform that is not only comprehensive and bipartisan, but also consistent with our basic values of justice and compassion.”

Rev. Dr. Sharon Stanley, Director of Disciples Refugee and Immigration Ministries, agrees. “Family unity is not only a national issue, but a personal and church issue as well. In our daily work and in our congregations, we constantly encounter immigrants whose parents and children, and grandparents and spouses, have been torn apart from one another for years. Such separation causes wrenching pain, and diminishes families’ abilities to focus upon education, progress, and contributions to our society. In response, we urge Congress consider humane legislation that increases the numbers of family based visas, and insures that families long suffering from separation will be reunited.”

First Person: Fernanda*
Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office
As told to Sarah Birkebak

Nothing like this had ever happened to me before, I thought, as seven armed immigration officials entered my home and put my hands behind my back. It was 9:00 at night when they came into my house with their large guns. They took my oldest son who was sleeping in the next room. We tried to explain that we hadn't done anything wrong, but they wouldn't listen. They just told us to be quiet and forced us to get on the bus. My 10 year old daughter was crying as they took us away and I worried what would happen to my family.

I came to the U.S. from Guatemala to escape the violence of my life there. My father was killed by guerrillas and I married my husband so that I would have protection. He was abusive to me and it was an impossible life. I knew I had to look for a place of refuge for myself and my children, so we followed my husband to the U.S. At first I didn't speak English or Spanish, only the Mayan dialect I spoke in Guatemala. My husband promised he would be a good father but it was a lie. We were stuck in a cycle of violence.

My oldest son is still in detention and my other son who is 19 was deported to Guatemala last year. I worry for my children that they will be like strangers when they are deported, that they will be persecuted because they will not know the language. It is dangerous for them in Guatemala; they will not have work or family to take care of them.

In the U.S. we found a church and they became like a family to me. While I was in detention my pastor took care of my children and introduced me to Gloria, a worker with the MCC West Coast Office which supports immigrant families in finding paths to citizenship. Gloria helped me prove that I was a victim of domestic violence and I was released from detention after three months. I am still under supervision and have to report every month to Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Gloria is helping me to get permission to work, but we are still waiting for results. As immigrants we need the help of President Obama and the people of the United States. We need to have freedom to make a life for ourselves and our families in this country. Families should never be separated with children being left to suffer without their parents.

I am not a criminal; I am a mother who is fighting for her children to give them a future. I feel like my heart is broken in two pieces because my children are separated from me. My greatest desire is to be together again with my family and for my children to continue studying in this country.

Fernanda has lived in the United States for more than 15 years. She has four children, two of whom are U.S. citizens.

**Name has been changed to protect identity.*



Rabbi David Saperstein
Director and Counsel

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**Written Testimony Submitted for the
“America’s Immigration System: Opportunities for Legal Immigration and Enforcement of
Laws against Illegal immigration”
Hearing Before the House Judiciary Committee
February 5, 2013**

The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism is the legislative office of the Union for Reform Judaism, whose 900 congregations across North America encompass 1.5 million Reform Jews, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis, whose membership includes more than 2,000 Reform rabbis. The Reform Movement has long advocated for comprehensive immigration reform, inspired by the oft-repeated Biblical mandate to “welcome the stranger” and rooted in the United States’ heritage as a nation of immigrants.

We have reached a point in our history where immigration reform is a legal, economic and moral imperative. Between eleven and twelve million undocumented immigrants currently live in the shadows of our society. They, like so many of our forebears, came to this country seeking better lives for themselves and their families. For many of these 12 million, America is the only home they have ever known. They contribute to our economy, our culture and our communities.

At the same time, chronic backlogs in visa distribution result in families being separated for years. While "immediate relatives" face the shortest wait for visas, those in lower preference categories are plagued by delays as long as 11 years. Unauthorized crossings at the U.S.-Mexico border have resulted in a record number of deaths in the past year alone. A comprehensive approach that balances enforcement with justice is the most realistic and humane solution to this escalating crisis. This should include, as well, full opportunities for LGBT immigrants and their families to participate in the immigration, family reunification and asylum systems.

The failure to address problems within our current immigration system has created an enforcement vacuum, too often leading non-federal authorities to attempt to enforce federal immigration law. When local law enforcement agents or health care professionals are required to enforce federal immigration law, it undermines their ability to work cooperatively with their immigrant communities. Domestic safety can be undermined when so many people are unable or unwilling to work cooperatively with law enforcement agencies. In addition, there are humanitarian implications from the fact that millions of undocumented immigrants are currently living in the shadows of society where they are potential targets for victimization or unscrupulous employers. Living in fear of law enforcement, they are afraid to report crimes, from domestic violence to threats to our national security. We cannot ignore the economic, social, and human reality of these “strangers” who are, in fact, our neighbors.

As a community of immigrants and refugees with a long history of sojourning in foreign lands, American Jews have a unique responsibility to ensure that the rights of non-citizens are protected by our nation’s immigration policy. Just as our mothers and fathers who came to America sought (and were often permitted) to reunite their families and resettle refugees from their lands of origin to America, today’s immigrant communities deserve similar opportunities. We are inspired by the command to “love the stranger for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 10:19), and are reminded of our own experiences moving

to America in the not so distant past. Truly “loving the stranger” means not simply providing technical frameworks and legal pathways, but also recognizing the human face of those seeking legal status – and in doing so, realizing the moral necessity of uniting and assisting families and loved ones.

We thank you again for this opportunity, and look forward to working with members of this committee and with all members of the 113th Congress to enact comprehensive immigration reform that lives up to our highest moral and American values.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Saperstein". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and a long, sweeping underline.

Rabbi David Saperstein

**Rev. Linda Jaramillo, Executive Minister
United Church of Christ
Justice and Witness Ministries**

In today's religious and political culture, we often hear that family values are the cornerstone of a healthy society. However in these descriptions, families are portrayed in a picture that leaves little room for diversity. We do not agree with the narrow scope that defines families in only certain ways, but rather we value families in their many different configurations. If this is our cultural value, we must ask a question. Whose children and elders are important and whose families are valued? We must not limit family unity to only certain societies of former immigrants.

Keeping families together is important for each member; however it is especially crucial for children and elders. If we agree that a healthy family is one that stays together to support its children, parents seeking a better life must not be deported and forced to leave their citizen children behind. If a healthy family is one that stays together to care for its elders, we cannot accept policies that separate them from those who are charged to care for them. Intentionally keeping families apart contradicts the moral values our nation professes. If we hold family values as the cornerstone of a healthy society, we must demand that fair immigration policies safeguard options for keeping families together.

Most of us are members of immigrant families who came from countries all over the world in search of freedom and a better life for the children. Personally, I am deeply grateful for the trials that my ancestors faced some five hundred years ago as they crossed the seas in search of a better life not only for themselves, but for the generations that would follow. Today's immigrant families are no different than those of generations past. If families were valued then, they must be valued now.



Monday, February 4, 2013

In anticipation of the hearing being held Tuesday, February 5th, by the House Subcommittee on Immigration, Sojourners has released the following statement:

Immigration reform must be guided by the core values we share as a nation. Evangelical Christians and other people of faith believe that protecting the unity of the family is one of these values and should be part of any reform. Immigrants make significant contributions to our communities and our economy. Instead of pitting employment-based visas versus family-based visas, we need real immigration reform that grows our economy, strengthens our families, and provides the 11 million aspiring Americans with a road map to citizenship.

Sojourners' mission is to articulate the biblical call to social justice, inspiring hope and building a movement to transform individuals, communities, the church, and the world. For more information about Sojourners or Jim Wallis, President and CEO of Sojourners, please visit www.sojo.net



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**Statement of
Richard T. Foltin, Esq.
Director of National and Legislative Affairs
Office of Government and International Affairs
American Jewish Committee (AJC)**

**Submitted on behalf of AJC to
The House Judiciary Committee**

**Hearing on
America's Immigration System: Opportunities for Legal Immigration and Enforcement of
Laws Against Illegal Immigration**

February 5, 2013

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Since its founding in 1906, AJC has been outspoken in support of fair and generous immigration policies. As American Jews, we recall how our parents and grandparents made their way to this country seeking a better life, and know that we have prospered in and contributed to this country. That same opportunity should be available for others. Comprehensive immigration reform will strengthen America's global competitiveness as well as allow hard-working immigrants an opportunity to succeed in the United States, for themselves and for future generations—and, at the same time, promote respect for the rule of law and protect our national security.

In advocating for fair, effective and humane immigration policies, AJC acts in accord with the American Jewish community's longstanding interest in, and commitment to, a United States immigration and refugee policy that represents our nation's best traditions. According to Jewish tradition, "strangers" are to be welcomed and valued, as we were once "strangers in the land of Egypt." The Torah 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).

Comprehensive immigration reform must provide a holistic approach to reforming our immigration system. Such reform should include:

1. A path to legalization for immigrants already in the United States.

There are an estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants currently residing in the United States. Comprehensive immigration reform would provide these immigrants with a path to legal status and eventual earned citizenship. This track to citizenship should be realistic, rather than being so burdensome that it prevents integration. Reasonable criteria may include learning English, having a job, maintaining a criminal-free background, and/or paying a modest fine and back taxes. However, fines should not be excessive, exemptions should be made for vulnerable populations, and immigrants should not have to return to their country of origin to apply for legal status or citizenship. These measures would only deter participation in the legalization process. Creating a path to citizenship for the undocumented would open the door to a better life for those who desire to work hard and contribute in a positive way to American society but for now must live in the shadows, a situation that offends the dignity of all human beings.

Additionally, within the 11 million undocumented immigrant population, there are an estimated 50,000-65,000 undocumented students who graduate from American high schools each year. Many came to the U.S. at a young age, have grown up in American schools, developed American values, and are American in every sense except their citizenship. AJC supports inclusion of the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act in a comprehensive immigration reform bill. The DREAM Act would provide this select group of immigrant students, who at this time are only eligible for a two-year temporary status under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, a permanent path to citizenship.

2. Reforms that favor reuniting families.

Family is the cornerstone of American society. Allowing immigrant families to more easily reunite with their loved ones strengthens our economy and promotes a strong social fabric in our communities. Promoting family unity incentivizes integration and economic development, as families provide strong foundations for learning English, purchasing a home, pursuing job opportunities, starting a business, preparing children for college, and strengthening the foundation of our communities. When families are together, the money they earn fuels the U.S. economy through taxes, investments, and the purchasing of goods and services. Because of the

strong economic and social value of family unity, enhancement of the family immigrant visa category must, under any circumstances, remain a priority of immigration reform.

Right now, many immigrant families remain separated for years – sometimes even decades – because of bureaucratic visa delays. Comprehensive immigration reform must reform the immigration system to expedite the visa process in favor of family reunification. This includes making family-based visas more accessible, reducing the current backlog of family-based visas, increasing the per-country numerical limitation for family-sponsored immigrants from 7 percent to 15 percent of admissions, and generally reorienting the visa system to prioritize family unity. These reforms would help ensure immigrant families reunite more quickly and protect families from being separated, thus promoting family stability and fostering economic growth.

Further, it is important that, in reforming the immigration system, we push back against efforts to deny citizenship to immigrant children born in the United States, which violates the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Also, we must ensure that family-based visas are not placed in competition with other visa categories, an approach that would be inimical to the goal of family unity and a better functioning immigration system.

3. Adjustment of quotas for future flows of immigrants, including high and low-skilled employment visas.

Immigration policies that promote entry of both high and low-skilled workers would strengthen our nation's global competitiveness and ensure that American businesses have the skilled and unskilled labor they need to compete in a global economy. AJC supports increasing or eliminating the numerical limit of visas for high-skilled workers in proportion to our country's economic demands, and establishing an additional visa category for foreign nationals who earn master's degrees or Ph.Ds in science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM).

Addressing the low-skilled labor demands of the agricultural industry, AJC supports inclusion of the Agricultural Jobs, Opportunity, Benefits and Security Act (AGJOBS) in an immigration reform bill, legislation that would grant earned legalization to undocumented agricultural workers based both on past agricultural work in the U.S. and a prospective work requirement. Seasonal agricultural workers, due to their migrant status, are highly vulnerable to economic exploitation and denial of their civil rights, with little ability to defend themselves. AgJOBS represents a step forward in putting such workers on the path to eligibility for earned legalization and citizenship, better protecting their rights, their access to our legal system and their stake in our society.

Establishing an improved process for admitting future workers to serve our nation's workforce needs would allow our country to meet its labor demands while protecting the workforce from abuse. These forward thinking reforms would help to ensure that American businesses have the labor they need to remain globally competitive and would benefit American businesses by providing a sustainable, reliable and competitive workforce.

4. Facilitation of and support for immigrant integration.

Many immigrants desire to naturalize but lack the necessary tools. AJC believes that the successful acculturation of immigrants is fundamental to a sound immigration policy, and urges greater efforts to facilitate newcomers' adjustment to American society. Acculturation efforts should convey an understanding of and

appreciation for American democratic institutions, patriotism, and constitutional principles, including equality under the law and due process. At the same time, without a vigorous commitment to pluralism and respect for immigrant cultures, America risks increasing ethnic tension and resentment. Both the successful incorporation of immigrants and a respect for pluralism are necessary to preserve the "American dream" and sustain democracy.

Consistent with these beliefs, AJC supports the creation and/or reinvigoration of, as well as increased funding for programs and practices designed to effectively acculturate immigrants, including increased support for programs for adults and children. Also, comprehensive immigration reform should include greater emphasis on the importance of learning English by newcomers—adults and children—with greater funding for such programs so that all who wish to do so have the opportunity to learn English upon their arrival in the U.S. or soon thereafter. Finally, there must be recognition that acculturation cannot be accomplished without the significant participation of community institutions.

5. Smart and humane enforcement measures that bolster our national security.

Border policies must be consistent with humanitarian values and with the need to treat all individuals with respect, while allowing the United States to implement its immigration laws and identify and prevent the entry of criminals, and of persons who wish to do us harm or otherwise pose a risk to our national security.

In updating and reforming border security measures, there should be (1) greater intelligence sharing regarding potential terrorists among the nation's intelligence and gatekeeper agencies; (2) increased use of state-of-the-art anti-fraud technology to create counterfeit-resistant passports and visas, and analyze suspect documents; (3) layers of security with multiple screening points for those departing for and arriving in the U.S.; and (4) improvements in the system that tracks foreign nationals who enter and leave the U.S., including the vigorous monitoring of those who enter with student, visitor, or employment visas; matching of entries into and exits from the U.S. in order to better alert the government to those who stay in the U.S. beyond the terms of their visas; and improved enforcement of applicable laws for those who overstay their visas.

To the extent Congress considers, as part of comprehensive immigration reform, the creation of a mandatory electronic work-eligibility verification system and action on "employer sanctions" that penalize employers for the knowing employment of unauthorized immigrants, such measures should incorporate adequate safeguards to protect workers from discrimination in the workplace.

6. Reform of detention policies, due process protections, and special protection for asylum seekers, refugees and vulnerable populations.

The United States has a long history of global leadership in protecting persecuted refugees and displaced persons. Immigration reform legislation must include key changes to the U.S. asylum system to better ensure that refugees who seek the protection of the United States are afforded meaningful access to a fair, effective and timely asylum adjudication process and the U.S. must take steps to ensure that the U.S. asylum system reflects U.S. values and commitments to protecting the persecuted.

AJC supports the recommendations proposed in the Refugee Protection Act (RPA) of 2011 (H.R. 2185), and urges that an immigration reform bill include provisions to eliminate the limitations that prevent qualified individuals from applying for asylum, improve legal information for immigrants, invest in our immigration

courts, and expand alternatives to detention, especially for asylum seekers and vulnerable populations. Enforcement measures such as detention and raids should be narrowly tailored, and should be carried out in a humane fashion and in accord with due process.

In sum, AJC calls upon our elected officials to enact immigration reform legislation that provides 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 our family-based immigration system to significantly reduce waiting times for separated families who currently wait many years to be reunited; establishes new 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; reduces the use of detention for immigrants, especially vulnerable groups and those seeking asylum; and ensures that border protection policies 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, thereby bolstering our national security.

As a faith-based organization, we call attention to the moral dimensions of public policy and pursue policies that uphold the human dignity of each person, all of whom are made *b'tselem elohim*, in the image of G-d. 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 inherent dignity and rights of every individual, even as it enhances our national security and promotes respect for the rule of law. It is our collective prayer that the legislative process will produce a just immigration system of which our nation of immigrants can be proud.

AJC appreciates the opportunity to submit this statement and welcomes your questions and comments.