

Clergy and Social Justice Leaders Reject ‘Gang of Eight’ Efforts to Radically Redefine Family

Washington, D.C. - As details of the Senate’s ‘Gang of Eight’ immigration framework comes to light, the faith community is gravely concerned about proposed efforts to redefine the meaning of family through the reduction and unprecedented restriction of family visas. As reported yesterday in the [Washington Post](#), the Senate proposal could eliminate adult children and siblings as qualified family visa categories. The faith community stands united and ready to reject efforts that would inflict further harm on aspiring American families.

The following quotes from clergy and social justice leaders detail the breadth of the faith community’s opposition to this harmful and unjust policy proposal.

Rev. Michael-Ray Matthews, Baptist minister and Director of Clergy Organizing for PICO National Network, **California**

“To be truly reflective of American values immigration reform legislation should do everything possible to keep families together. Additionally, the idea that adult children or adult siblings are not ‘qualified family’ is ridiculous. It is an American tradition to take care of our parents as adult children and stay close to our siblings throughout our lives. We count on our whole family to be there through the hard times; an illness, the loss of a job, the death of a parent. The notion that elimination of family visas should be considered because immigration should be an ‘economically-based’ system is totally antithetical to the teachings of every faith practiced in this country.”

Sr. Simone Campbell, Executive Director, NETWORK, **Washington, D.C.**

“The only way forward on immigration reform that builds our nation and the common good is to ensure that families are united and supported. All studies indicate that immigrants acculturate to the United States more quickly if they are united with their families. Faith also teaches us that family is the model for all of society. It would be wrong to cave in to crass business interests by dismantling principles of our immigration system that actually build up our society. Everyone should say a resounding NO to this crass maneuver to undermine our society for the benefit of the 1%. This needs to be about the 100% and that means FAMILY is at the heart of our policy.”

Rev. John L. McCullough, President & CEO, Church World Service

"Senators working on immigration reform are considering reducing family visas and preventing U.S. citizens from reuniting with their siblings and adult children. This is a crucial error, and the Senators involved should immediately reconsider and abandon this

approach. Family unity is intrinsic to our values as people of faith. We have witnessed the many ways that our immigration system has separated families, and thus we advocate for immigration reform that prioritizes family unity and provides a pathway to citizenship. Any immigration system that ignores the deep, God-given desire to be united with family renders itself ineffective. We are opposed to any reduction in family visas or proposals that claim a false choice between family and employment visas."

Rabbi Noam Marans, Director, Interreligious and Intergroup Relations American Jewish Committee, **New York**

"It is imperative that Congress preserve the current legal channels of family-sponsored immigration, which include allowing U.S. citizens to sponsor their siblings and married adult children. Siblings and children, regardless of their age or marital status, are integral to the American family unit and must be kept together. Our Jewish tradition teaches us that we should not wrong or oppress a stranger, for we were once strangers in the land of Egypt. No American should be separated from his or her family, and just as we have been able to build our lives alongside our brothers, sisters and children, we must preserve that opportunity for new Americans today."

Timothy King, Chief Communications Officer, Sojourners, **Washington, D.C.**

"Family matters. And, our immigration system should reflect that. As a Christian organization we believe that our immigration system should ease the process for families to stay together. Fundamental changes should not be policies that perpetuate a zero-sum game in immigration. The family-based immigration system has been around for generations and any changes made should be to strengthen and improve the areas where it is ineffective in order to create a more just and fair system."

"We cannot seek to implement tighter limits on family visas as a tradeoff for other needs within our broken system. By eliminating the preference 3 and 4 categories of the family-based system, we would not be addressing the diverse and fundamental needs of our country. Family is key to people's productivity and their desire to succeed. Workers of all skill levels have family members they hope can migrate to the U.S. and it is a family's support network that sustains and fuels immigrant's efforts and enables them to be positive contributors to our communities and our economy. Some families should not be sacrificed for economic prosperity."

"As Christians who believe that all human beings are created in God's image, and should be treated with dignity and respect, we are concerned with these significant restrictions to family categories. Decision makers should pursue policies that promote family unity."

Linda Hartke, President and CEO, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, **Baltimore, MD**

"LIRS and Lutherans all over America strongly believe that our nation's immigration system must stop tearing families apart and must instead protect family unity for all migrants and refugees. Every immigrant entrepreneur I have the privilege to meet is eager to tell me the story of how their family made it possible for them to succeed and give back to this country that welcomed them. Immigrants who come here with their families foster innovation and development of new businesses, particularly small and medium-sized businesses that would not otherwise exist, creating jobs for American workers and raising revenues for our recovering economy. Families also provide support and care for young children and the elderly, allowing others to focus on working and contributing to American society."

Rev. Thomas P. Greene, SJ, Secretary for Social and International Ministries, U.S. Jesuit Conference

“The U.S. Jesuit Conference is troubled by the recent news that members of the Senate are discussing a plan to reduce the number of available family visas. In response to this, the Jesuit Conference urges 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.”

“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 the our broken immigration system. Currently, near lifetime long waits for family visas for nationals of some countries leave thousands of migrants with no choice but to enter the United States irregularly in order to reunite with their family members. Further reductions in the number of family visas would surely increase suffering and undermine efforts to prevent future irregular migration into our country.

“As the social and economic costs of separating children from their parents and incarcerating caregivers and wage earners grow higher each year, we strongly believe that the number of family visas should not be reduced, but should in fact be increased to expedite the family reunification process.”

Rev. Dr. Ronald J. Degges, President of Disciples Home Missions, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the U.S. & Canada.

“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 show love for our neighbors, unite communities, and avoid the devastation caused whenever families are torn apart. Family based immigration improves communities and our economy, and helps families develop most quickly to be satisfied and productive contributors to the U.S. Family reunification must remain a priority in any immigration reform. We therefore strongly oppose any proposal to reduce or eliminate any categories of family visas, including married adult children and siblings.”

Bishop Alan Scarfe, from the Episcopal Diocese of Iowa

“The idea of limiting the definition of family in the new immigration legislation reminds me that we may not have moved as forward in our thinking as we may assume from the time when we brought people here as slaves and tore up their family structure or forced people off their native lands without regard for the unity of their families. It takes centuries to develop a compassionate people. This is a time for one nation under God to not be afraid of our own gifts and generosity.”

Amy Woolam Echeverria, Director, Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach

"Lent is a season to recognize our failures and seek forgiveness. Just as Jesus spent 40 days in the desert, we remember our immigrant brothers and sisters who have made many sacrifices, sometimes including death crossing through the U.S.-Mexico desert, and leaving behind family members- their source of support. Columban missionaries on the U.S.-Mexico border and across the country see the pain and hardship that

immigrants face by being separated from their children, spouses, brothers, sisters, and aging parents. Columbians also see how when families are united and whole how these bonds bring joy and can contribute to stronger communities here in the U.S. We urge the Senate to protect the family visa categories in any comprehensive immigration reform."

Rabbi Joel Mosbacher, Beth Haverim Shir Shalom, **Mahwah, NJ**

"In the Jewish community, as we approach Passover, our Festival of Freedom, we recall the experience of what it was like to be the stranger, the other. And in our own lives, most of us have immigration stories in our own families in recent memory. We know the heart of the immigrant. Our faith tradition and our own family experiences call us to speak out against tightening limits on family visas. We need comprehensive immigration reform now that gives a path to citizenship-- not more regulation that prevents families from being united in this country."

Rev. Dr. Gerald L. Mansholt, Bishop of the Central States Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

"Families being whole and healthy are of vital importance to Lutheran congregations and local communities. The love, commitment, and support of family is a great gift that creates purpose for individuals, is central to our faith, and grounds the very structure of our society. There is no reason to believe that immigrant families are any different."