

**Compiled Faith Statements for the Congressional Record pertaining to the
Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing on Monday, March 18th, 2013**

Church World Service..... 1
Leadership Conference of Women Religious..... 2
American Jewish Committee 3-4
Friends Committee on National Legislation..... 5-6
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd 7
American Friends Service Committee..... 8
Sojourners 9
Episcopal Church..... 10-11
Franciscan Action Network 12



**Church World Service statement for the Congressional Record pertaining to the
Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing on Monday, March 18th, 2013**

As the Senate considers how to best fix the U.S. immigration system, Church World Service (CWS), a 67-year old humanitarian organization, urges all Senators to work together to enact immigration reforms that strengthens family unity and provides a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants.

The CWS network of 37 protestant denominations and 36 refugee resettlement offices across the country welcomes newcomers by helping them integrate into their new communities. We advocate for immigration reform not only because it is the right thing to do to improve the lives of our immigrant brothers and sisters, but also because it is the smart thing to do for our economy and communities.

Immigration reform must prioritize family unity, which is integral to the economic contribution of immigrants and key to the function of our immigration system. When families are separated by visa backlogs, bars to re-entry, and no option to adjust status, our immigration system, by failing to function in a timely way, necessitates illegal entry. To reform the family-based visa system, we urge Congress to:

1. Protect and strengthen current family immigration categories (spouse, children, parents, and siblings)
2. Increase family-based visas, including a temporary increase to clear the backlog with integrity
3. Recapture unused visas for use in the following year
4. Increase the per-country cap from 7 percent to 15 percent to reduce backlogs
5. Reclassify the spouses and minor children of Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs) as immediate relatives, and re-allocate the remaining visas available to the other existing family categories
6. Add to the list of family immigration categories permanent partners of U.S. Citizens and LPRs

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.

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. A key example of this are immigrant-owned companies, many of which are run by families, contribute more than \$775 billion dollars annually to U.S. gross domestic product, creating jobs that are essential to economic growth.¹

Visa backlogs force LPRs to wait more than two years to be reunited with their spouse or minor child, and U.S. Citizens to wait as long as 24 years to be reunited with their sister or brother. CWS urges Congress to authorize additional visas so that families can be reunited in a timely manner. We are opposed to any reduction in family visas or proposals that claim a false-choice between family and employment visas.

CWS is committed to working with all members of the Senate and House 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

¹ *Open for Business*. The Partnership for a New American Economy.
<<http://www.renewoureconomy.org/sites/all/themes/pnae/openforbusiness.pdf>>.

and for the fabric of our communities – families. We urge all members of the Senate to strive toward this goal.



Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing, March 18, 2013
“How Comprehensive Immigration Reform Should Address the Needs of Women and Families”

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 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 share the pain of mothers separated from their children and fathers who have risked their lives for love of their families. They know the sorrow of siblings who have not seen each other since their youth and grandparents who fear they will never know their grandchildren.

Families are the building blocks of our society. 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.

Immigrant women, like all women, are the backbone of their families and communities. They contribute to the economy, keep their families together, and invest in our future by investing in their children’s education. Immigrant women are the drivers of social integration, encouraging their families to learn English, succeed in school and business, pursue naturalization, and fulfill their civic duties.

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, provides humanitarian consideration for families torn apart by detention, and guarantees equal protection and equal opportunity for immigrant women.

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.



Office of Government
and International Affairs
1156 15th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20005
t: 202.785.4200
f: 202.785.4115
www.ajc.org

**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 Senate Judiciary Committee**

**Hearing on
Immigration Revision and Needs of Women and Families**

March 18, 2013

**T: (202) 785-5463, F: (202) 659-9896
e-mail: foltinr@ajc.org**

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).

AJC affirms our commitment to the passage of a common-sense comprehensive immigration reform bill that serves our nation's interests and upholds our Constitution. In providing a holistic approach to reforming our immigration system, this bill should include: a path to legalization and eventual earned citizenship for

immigrants already in the U.S.; adjustment of quotas for future flows of immigrants, including high and low-skilled employment visas; facilitation and support for immigrant integration; smart and humane enforcement measures that bolster our national security; reform of detention policies, due process protections, and special protection for asylum seekers, refugees and vulnerable populations; and, critically important, it is imperative that this bill include 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 be a priority of immigration reform.

Right now, many immigrant families remain separated for years – sometimes even decades – because of bureaucratic visa delays. It is essential that—along with other measures directed at repairing our broken immigration system—we 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 that immigrant families reunite more quickly and protect families from being separated, thus promoting family stability and fostering economic growth. Further, 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.

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.

FRIENDS COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL LEGISLATION

... a Quaker lobby in the public interest



Statement on National Legislation for the Congressional Record Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing Monday, March 18, 2013

The Friends Committee on National Legislation, founded in 1943, is guided by the spiritual values of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). Our work on immigration is led by the call for right relationships among people and between individuals and God. We believe that respect for human and civil rights is essential to safeguarding the integrity of our society and the inherent dignity of all human beings. We recognize that governments have an indispensable role in upholding these rights and citizens have the responsibility to make governments more responsive, open, and accountable.

Therefore, we call for humane comprehensive immigration reform. We have seen the degeneration of the U.S. immigration system over the last three decades. Overly punitive laws, in tandem with increased enforcement and an inefficient bureaucracy, have led to systemic violations of rights: indiscriminate raids, detention without due process, worker exploitation, and families separated for years or even decades. Humane immigration reform would restore integrity to the U.S. tradition of welcoming immigrants and provide real solutions to a broken immigration system. We believe that fundamental and comprehensive reform of U.S. immigration policy is needed in order to:

- Create an orderly, equitable, and efficient legal immigration system;
- Enforce employment and labor rights for all workers, regardless of immigration status;
- Protect human and civil rights for immigrants currently living in the United States;
- Support communities with large concentrations of immigrants and facilitate immigrant integration; and
- Align enforcement with humanitarian values.

Recognizing the critical role of family in the development of healthy individuals and communities, FCNL believes that immigration policies should make reunification of spouses,

parents, children, and siblings a top priority, and should include families headed by same-sex couples as well as opposite-sex couples. Reform of the family immigration system should retain family preference categories at adequate levels, augment per-country caps, remove bars to reentry and adjustment of status for those seeking to reunite with family, and eliminate lengthy visa backlogs by recapturing immigrant visas lost to bureaucratic delays and rolling them over to the next fiscal year. Family visas should not be placed in competition with employment visas. Spouses and minor children of lawful permanent residents should be reclassified as immediate relatives to ensure that these individuals are reunited as quickly as possible.

FCNL welcomes the Bipartisan Framework for Comprehensive Immigration Reform released on January 28 by eight U.S. senators. We congratulate the authors of the Framework, who reached across party lines to acknowledge the need to fix our broken immigration system, and to propose some practical solutions.

However, we are concerned at the news that the Senate bipartisan group is considering cutting family visa categories for siblings and adult married children of U.S. citizens. Cutting family visa categories increases pressures for illegal immigration, exacerbating the problems of the country's broken immigration system. Evidence indicates that many of the undocumented immigrants in the U.S. came here to be reunited with their families, when they had no legal means to immigrate. Congress will not fix the broken system by dividing families and reducing legal avenues for family migration. We look forward to working with Congress and members of the committee on the details of reform legislation.



Sisters of the Good Shepherd

The National
Advocacy Center

National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd statement for the Congressional Record pertaining to the Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing on Monday, March 18, 2013

Since the Order of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd was founded in France in 1835, the Order has dedicated itself to serving poor and marginal women and families. The work of the Sisters in 70 countries in 5 continents, 22 States, and 2 U.S. Territories is based on the belief in the unique value of the human person, regardless of age, sex, culture or religion. Each person has the right to a basic quality of life; adequate income, shelter, opportunities for education and employment, quality health care, and nutrition. As Catholics, our faith requires that everyone should be treated with the utmost dignity and respect.

As recently stated by Archbishop José H. Gomez, the Catholic Church has a long history of involvement in the immigration issue, both in the advocacy arena and in welcoming and assimilating waves of immigrants and refugees who have helped build our nation throughout her history. Family reunification, upon which much of the U.S. immigration system has been based for decades, should remain the cornerstone of U.S. immigration policy. Immigrant families contribute to our nation and help form new generations of Americans. Even while many migrants come to the United States to find employment, many come as families.

The U.S. family-based immigration system, which helps keep families together, is in urgent need of reform. The current visa quota system, last revised by Congress in 1990, established statutory ceilings for family immigration that are now inadequate to meet the needs of immigrant families wishing to reunite in a timely manner. The result has been waiting times of five years or more—and more than eight years for Mexican permanent residents—for husbands and wives to reunite with each other and for mothers and fathers to reunite with minor children. The waiting times for adult siblings to reunite can be twenty years or longer.

Such lengthy waiting times are unacceptable and actually provide unintentional incentive for some migrants to come to the United States illegally. Substantial changes must be made to the U.S. family-based immigration system so that it will meet the goal of facilitating, rather than hindering, family unity. Such changes can be made in several ways, but they should not alter the basic categories in the family preference system.

We oppose the imposition of such a point system, which we fear would place higher value on highly-educated and skilled immigrants than on family ties. We reject the premise that the family-based system has historically not worked in the best interest of this nation. Indeed, there is evidence that immigrant families represent the backbone of communities in this nation, especially in urban areas. They have started and maintained family businesses, from restaurants to dry cleaning stores and from auto mechanic businesses to pastry shops. Immigrant families also take care of each other and ensure that all members of the family are provided for, as well as contribute their talents to the strengthening of local neighborhoods.

Based upon our belief in the importance of family unity, the National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd urges Congress to:

1. Protect and strengthen current family immigration categories (spouse, children, parents, and siblings)
2. Increase family-based visas, including a temporary increase to clear the backlog with integrity
3. Recapture unused visas for use in the following year
4. Increase the per-country cap from 7 percent to 15 percent to reduce backlogs
5. Reclassify the spouses and minor children of Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs) as immediate relatives, and re-allocate the remaining visas available to the other existing family categories
6. Add to the list of family immigration categories permanent partners of U.S. Citizens and LPRs

We look forward to continue working with members of Congress to achieve compassionate, comprehensive immigration reform that will give priority to family unity.



American Friends Service Committee

American Friends Service Committee statement for the Congressional Record pertaining to the Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing Monday, March 18, 2013

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is an almost 100-year old faith-based organization grounded in the Quaker belief in the dignity and worth of every person. AFSC provides direct legal services and engages in organizing with immigrants and allies along with advocacy and movement building throughout the U.S. Our immigration policy recommendations are grounded in AFSC's history and values as a faith-based organization and in the voices of the impacted communities with whom we are deeply connected.

Not surprisingly, immigrants deported from the U.S. are members of their family units. The Department of Homeland Security released statistics stating that 204,810 parents of U.S. citizen children were removed from the U.S. between July 2010 and September 2012. What numbers cannot show is the life changing impact of family separation on children in particular, as well as on the family as a whole. Youth who have lost a parent due to deportation or detention exhibit dramatic behavioral changes such as heightened anxiety, anger, fear and frequent crying, as illustrated in a 2010 Urban Institute study. Sadly, upon the removal of their parent(s), some children are left without a loved one to care for them. According to the Applied Research Center over 5,000 children currently in foster care have parents who are detained or deported. Experts estimate that an additional 15,000 children may be placed in foster care over the next five years as a result of immigration enforcement.

Today, more than half of all documented and undocumented immigrants in the U.S. are women and an estimated 4.1 million women are undocumented. Women without legal status often live in the shadows out of fear of being separated from their families through deportation, rendering them extremely vulnerable to workplace exploitation and domestic abuse. This population's well-being is further eroded through denial of basic health care and social services.

AFSC offers the following policy recommendations:

- End arrests, detention, and deportation of immigrants.
- Pass legislation that allows people who reside in the U.S. to apply immediately for permanent residence and citizenship if they choose.
- Expedite the processing of pending visa applications.
- Ensure that positive factors are always balanced against any negative factors when determining eligibility for status.
- Ensure that children can immigrate with parents and eliminate harsh obstacles to immigrating.
- Extend access to quality, affordable health care and social services to everyone, regardless of immigration status.
- Eliminate rules that discriminate between immigrants and non-immigrants in determining eligibility for public benefits.

AFSC urges the Committee to exert visionary leadership and to support new immigration policies that respect the human rights and equal economic opportunity of all in our communities. Thank you for this opportunity to submit a statement to the Committee.



March 18, 2013

In anticipation of the hearing being held on Monday, March 18th, by the Senate Judiciary Committee, Sojourners has released the following statement:

Families come in many shapes and sizes but all of them matter. As Christians and Americans, preservation and protection of family is a central value and family unity should be prioritized in any comprehensive immigration reform package. Each individual should be offered the option to reside close to their loved ones through a legitimate and transparent process which seeks to safeguard a family's wellbeing and security. It is family that sustains and fuels immigrant's efforts and enables them to be positive contributors to our communities and our economy.

Our current impractical system separates thousands of families leaving children and parents devastated as they are separated from their loved ones. The huge backlogs at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and lack of legal avenues to migrate have separated families for prolonged periods of time burdening family members with difficult choices. Oftentimes, undocumented immigrants are forced to choose between being separated from their family members for an indefinite period of time or putting their lives a risk to reunite with relatives as they cross the border unauthorized.

A just immigration system must improve and strengthen the current immigration process by looking at the harmful issues that exist including huge backlogs, bars to re-entry and the lack of options to adjust status through immediate family members, all of which exacerbate lengthy waiting periods and make it unfeasible for those who want to apply legally. We urge all Senators to protect families as they develop a comprehensive package that provides a path towards citizenship for the 11 million aspiring Americans currently residing in the United States.

As Christians, we believe our immigration should respect the God given dignity of every person and that means not separating them from their families. Communities thrive when families who want to live together are able to. Creating an immigration system that promotes family unity shows the best of who we are as a nation.

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.sojn.net.

THE
Episcopal
CHURCH

**TESTIMONY OF ALEXANDER D. BAUMGARTEN AND KATIE CONWAY ON
BEHALF OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH²**

MARCH 18, 2013

We thank Senator Hirono of the Senate Judiciary Committee and Ranking Member Grassley for the opportunity to submit this testimony. We welcome this important hearing, “How Comprehensive Immigration Reform Should Address the Needs of Women and Families,” and wish to voice our strong support for the protection of the rights of women and families in all of our nation’s immigration laws. The Episcopal Church has been engaged in the ministry of welcoming immigrants and refugees for more than a century, walking with refugees and immigrants as they begin their new lives in our communities, and bearing daily witness to the human implications of our nation’s immigration laws.

Rooted in our understanding of the Christian imperative to “welcome the stranger,” the Episcopal Church’s highest governing body, the General Convention, has passed multiple resolutions affirming the right to family unity, and the right of families to reunify without undue delay. In summer 2012 this commitment to family unity for all U.S. citizens and Legal Permanent Residents (LPR) was strengthened even further through resolution D011, “Reform Unequal Immigration Law,” through which the Church pledged to support legislation that would expand our nation’s definition of family under immigration law to include the same-sex permanent partners and spouses of U.S. citizens and LPRs. This resolution also committed our dioceses and congregations to renewed advocacy on behalf of families and individuals of all sexual orientations who are facing unwanted moves, deportation or separation due to our nation’s immigration laws. There are an estimated 32, 300 binational, same-sex couples residing in the United States today, more than 45% of whom are raising children³. We believe that these families share the same right to dignity and fair treatment as other families, and therefore deserve to have their status as a family recognized and protected by our nation’s immigration laws.

Through pastoral care to members of our congregations and our ministry to resettle refugees, we witness daily the profound joy of reunification for families long separated, as well as the devastation of families kept apart. Keeping families apart through per-country caps, decades-long backlogs, redistribution of family visas to the employment system, failure to recapture visas lost to bureaucratic delay, and failure to recognize the immigration claims of same-sex partners harms the U.S. economy, fractures our communities, and denies the legacy of family immigration that has defined our nation. Families have always served as the foundation for strong communities, and the role they play in creating healthy individuals and aiding integration should not be diminished or disregarded. Family members help one another integrate, pursue job

² 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 nations.

³ *By the Numbers* Immigration Equality <http://immigrationequality.org/about/>

THE
Episcopal
CHURCH

opportunities, start their own businesses, and contribute economically, socially, and spiritually to our communities.

We believe that policies that uphold the unity of families and address the needs of migrant women are especially important in the context of our nation's commitment to welcoming and resettling refugees. Because of the violence and persecution refugees have faced in their countries

of origin, especially refugee women and girls who are at elevated risk for sexual and gender-based violence in displacement situations, many refugee families do not fit our traditional definition of "nuclear" families. Refugee families have often experienced the loss of a spouse, the loss of parents, and decades-long separation from children and grandchildren. These divided families in particular could face permanent separation if our nation's definition of family were to be narrowed or family categories eliminated. For refugees who have resettled in the United States, a sibling or a married adult child could be the only remaining family member with whom they can reunite, yet this reunification under our current system would take decades. In cases where a principal refugee sponsors his or her child and that child has a child of his or her own (derivative of a derivative), that initial refugee's grandchild would not qualify for reunification, resulting in permanent separation.

Our immigration system must be transformed into a just and humane system that discerns between those who enter without inspection to do us harm and those who enter because our system cannot provide them with a clear and timely path to reunification with their loved ones or legal employment. The Episcopal Church recognizes the necessity of enforcement policies and the responsibility of the government to protect its citizens, but we also believe we must work to change our nation's 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." Destructive enforcement programs like Secure Communities that encourage racial profiling and tear families apart at great fiscal and human cost should be terminated, and alternatives to detention that allow families to remain together throughout immigration proceedings should be prioritized.

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

Respectfully submitted,
Alexander D. Baumgarten and Katie Conway



Franciscan Action Network

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

3025 4th Street, N.E. • Suite 18 • Washington, DC 20017 • 202-527-7575 • 1-888-364-3388 (toll free) • 202-527-7576 (fax)

FRANCISCAN ACTION NETWORK URGES SUPPORT FOR FAMILY REUNIFICATION

Submitted to Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing March 18, 2013

Franciscan Action Network strongly supports the position of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Interfaith Immigration Coalition that family unity is an essential component of common sense, compassionate immigration reform. Families are the basic unit 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 and due to long waiting lines for family visas, have 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. Separation places a particularly heavy burden on women because many are left with total responsibility for the financial, educational and psychological well-being of children. Families who have been reunited are grateful, even more willing to be productive, and desire to become responsible US citizens.

We support changes which would expedite family reunification, increasing per country caps to 15% to reduce long waiting times, and eliminating the cap on number of family visas available. Existing family backlogs must be quickly reviewed, resolved and processed. Annual unused and unclaimed family-based and employment-based visas should be recaptured, and provision made to ensure that future unused visas are not wasted. Do not put family based visas in competition with skilled worker visas; increase the number of worker visas as well as the number of family visas.

Those who currently benefit from a family-based system include: immediate relatives (spouses, unmarried minor children, parents of US citizens; spouses and minor children of LPRs; unmarried adult children of LPRs; married adult children of US citizens; siblings of US citizens. Do not narrow the family preference categories, but retain them at adequate levels. Work for immigration reform whose goal is to keep families of several generations together and provides a common sense, humane pathway to citizenship for those who desire it and qualify for it. We urge that point systems not be used to determine eligibility for visas since such systems tend to put family immigration migrants at a great disadvantage.

Thank you for your serious consideration of the impact of family separation on immigrant families.

Sister Marie Lucey, OSF
Director of Advocacy
Franciscan Action Network