

National Clergy Leaders Urge Protection of Family Unity as Senate Immigration Markup Proceeds

(Washington, DC) - As the Senate Judiciary Committee begins the markup of the Immigrant Visa Title II section of the bipartisan immigration bill, prominent clergy leaders are lifting up their prophetic voices and strongly supporting amendments that would strengthen family unity. The faith community remains committed to pro-family immigration reform that unites immigrant families, and is supporting amendments offered by Senator Mazie Hirono (D-HI) that would restore the ability of U.S. citizens to sponsor their siblings and married children over 30, and allow individuals with registered provisional immigrant status to sponsor their immediate family members outside of the United States.

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While the current immigration reform bill, S. 744, includes some positive provisions that would improve family reunification, it would also eliminate the ability for U.S. citizens to sponsor their siblings and married children over the age of 30. The following quotes from clergy and social justice leaders demonstrate the faith community's support for amendments that would improve the current immigration reform bill's family provisions, and opposition to proposals that would prevent family reunification:

Bishop Minerva Carcaño, Resident Bishop of the United Methodist Church, Los Angeles Conference:

"The strength of any society always begins with strong families. Therefore, it is crucial that the Senate Judiciary Committee pass amendments that strengthen the family immigration system. Important changes to S. 744 include allowing individuals with registered provisional immigrant (RPI) status to sponsor their spouse and children outside of the U.S. and reunifying same-sex family members. No one deserves to be cut off from the strongest bond in life they will ever have - their family. As a Christian, I urge the Senate to strengthen our family immigration system for as they do so, they will strengthen our country as well."

Lisa Sharon Harper, Director of Mobilizing, Sojourners:

"As people of faith, we should urge Senate Judiciary Committee members to support amendments that strengthen an immigration system that protects families. We pray that our leaders will work to preserve the family unity of aspiring Americans as they seek an earned pathway to citizenship. Christians should strongly urge members of the Senate Judiciary Committee to oppose any amendment that would make it more difficult for families to stay together."

Rev. John L. McCullough, President and CEO, Church World Service:

"CWS's diverse network of member communions and local refugee resettlement offices across the country knows firsthand the value of family unity. As we welcome refugees and assist with immigration legal services, we've witnessed the heartbreak caused by our current immigration system. CWS applauds the bipartisan group of Senators' effort to reform our immigration system, but the bill must keep families together. CWS is fully supportive of the family amendments being offered by Senator Mazie Hirono (D-HI), which seek to improve the immigration bill by restoring the ability of U.S. citizens to sponsor their siblings and married children, regardless of age. We urge all members of the Senate Judiciary to vote for these amendments that would promote family unity."

Sister Anne Curtis, RSM, Leadership Team of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy:

"As the Senate Judiciary Committee considers amendments to immigrant visas in Title II, we remind our elected officials that faith communities prioritize family unity in addition to a pathway to citizenship. If the final version of the immigration bill does not provide registered provisional immigrants (RPIs) the ability to sponsor their spouse and children, the law would fail to meet the expectations of many faith traditions and

organizations. We believe in order to cherish the human dignity of our immigrant brother and sisters and create a strong social fabric; we cannot deny immediate family members being together.”

Sister Mary Ellen Lacy, NETWORK , A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby:

“Family unity is an extremely high priority for us. Our faith teaches us to recognize and hold up the sacredness of family. Immigrant families must be made whole in order to live as God intended them to live. Family unity is an extremely high priority for us. Our faith teaches us to recognize and hold up the sacredness of family. Immigrant families must be made whole in order to live as God intended them to live. This reality calls us to establish a compassionate and inclusive immigration process which will reunite all family members, including adult children and siblings.”

Bishop Alan Scarfe, 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. "

United States Provincials of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd:

“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 people. The work of the Sisters in 70 countries in 5 continents, 22 States, and 2 U.S. Territories is based on the belief that everyone, regardless of age, sex, culture or religion, 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.

Based upon that belief system, the National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd requests that you enact fair and comprehensive immigration reform. This reform should include a path to citizenship, preference for family unity, and job portability which allows workers to change employers. Further, we call for an end to laws and policies that provide for detention for months without charges, secret hearings, and ethnic profiling.”

Janet Mock, CSJ, Executive Director of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious:

“Our broken immigration system too often splits families, separates spouses, and keeps parents from their children. Families are the building blocks of our society. Our nation needs, and our people deserve, immigration reform that reflects the paramount importance of family unity.

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, fathers with their daughters and sisters and brothers with their parents and siblings. If we fail to act, we not only place the well-being of our families, we threaten the heart and soul of our nation.”

Bishop Prince Singh, Episcopal Diocese of Rochester, New York:

"When our immigration policy protects the unity and cultural integrity of ‘family’ as understood by those who make our country their home, our common life, security and prosperity are enhanced in the long run."

Rt. Rev. Kirk S. Smith, Episcopal Diocese of Arizona:

“I support family immigration, and don’t believe that the Senate can restrict the definition of family. It is critical that families be kept together, and citizens need to be able to continue to sponsor their children

and loved ones. I find these proposed provisions especially troubling in the refugee resettlement context. For many refugees, a sibling or an adult married child is the only surviving relative with whom they can reunite.”

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

“Family is a core value of the Latina/Latino community. We do not see ourselves as totally independent individuals, but rather as members of an extended community of shared values and blood ties. The tragedy of the present immigration system is that it has kept many families separated from those who are our kin. Family reunification is critical for us and we ask that the Senate take into consideration our traditional family values as they consider the Immigrant Visa Title II of the immigration bill. We ask the Senators to improve the likelihood for family members to be reunited in as short as possible a period of time.”

Rev. Dr. Gerald L. Mansholt, Bishop of the Central States Synod, 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. In recognition of the importance of families, Congress should support amendments to comprehensive immigration reform that expand the ability of families to reunite.” *[The Central States Synod includes Missouri and Kansas]*

Ronald J. Degges, President, Disciples Home Missions, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the US and Canada denomination:

“As Christians committed to God’s call to ‘welcome the stranger’ and to promote the wholeness and well-being of families, Disciples’ leaders recognize that family unity is not only a national issue, but a personal and church issue as well. We constantly encounter immigrants in our churches 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.

Therefore, we strongly support the Senate Judiciary Committee in passing amendments that allow US citizens to sponsor siblings and married children over 30, hopefully without any age limit, but at minimum to age 39. We promote legislation that increases the likelihood that family members can be reunited, and that allows individuals with RPI status to sponsor their spouse and children outside of the US. To not do so can result-- as in the case of one of our immigrant pastors recently-- in the heartbreaking death of a spouse overseas, despite years of processing and waiting, paying and praying for a reunion under our current broken system.”