

August 21, 2013

Dear Speaker Boehner,

We, the undersigned faith organizations and leaders write to express our concern about provisions in the Strengthen and Fortify Enforcement, or SAFE Act (H.R. 2278). As people of faith, we are called by our sacred texts to assist newcomers who seek safety, a new life, reunification with their families, and spiritual comfort. We are troubled that the SAFE Act would create new crimes for being present in the United States without lawful immigration status or aiding a migrant or refugee who lacks immigration status, expand the use of mandatory and indefinite immigration detention, encourage state and local law enforcement officials' participation in immigration enforcement, and decrease protections and immigration relief for certain migrant groups.

We write today in specific objection to provisions in the SAFE Act that would criminalize religious leaders and houses of worship that provide humanitarian assistance to all persons regardless of immigration status as these provisions run directly counter to our beliefs in generosity, hospitality and welcome. The faith community is deeply troubled that Section 314 of the SAFE Act would make it a crime to transport undocumented immigrants and "encourage or induce a person to reside in the United States" if that person lacks immigration status. The penalties for engaging in any of these activities are steep, ranging from 3 to 20 years in prison.

People of faith commonly accept into their congregations and communities all newcomers and those in need without checking immigration paperwork. Providing transportation in particular would criminalize ordinary acts of kindness and would even criminalize members of mixed-status families traveling together. Mayor Paul Bridges of Uvalde, Georgia had this to say about similar prohibitions in Georgia's HB 87:

If I fail to use my turn signal or speed while taking fellow parishioners to church, and I incur a traffic violation with an undocumented person in the van, then I could end up with a criminal penalty --even a felony with a second offense. If I don't check the papers of friends who stay with my family, I might be charged with harboring an undocumented person.¹

Not only would passage of the SAFE Act create greater anxiety among migrant communities, it could lead members in places of worship to refuse to engage in acts of kindness and hospitality for fear of being prosecuted, fined or imprisoned. Such a law that prohibits compassion and acts of humanitarian assistance surely violate sacred principles of helping neighbors and showing love to all of God's children.

Unfortunately, provisions in the SAFE Act are not new. These unkind and harsh provisions are reminiscent of the Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005, known as the "Sensenbrenner Bill," or H.R. 4437 (introduced in the 109th Congress), which similarly would have criminalized the work of churches, attorneys, social service

¹ Bridges, Paul W. "Why I'm suing Georgia over immigration law." June 20, 2011, CNN Opinion. <http://www.cnn.com/2011/OPINION/06/19/bridges.georgia.immigration/index.html>

agencies, and refugee organizations acting in good faith to care for those in need. Much like the SAFE Act, under this bill where an undocumented person with no other means of support appealed to their house of worship for assistance, those religious institutions who fed, clothed, housed or otherwise assisted the individual, would have committed a crime. After the House of Representatives passed H.R. 4437 in 2005, the faith community joined hands with millions of Americans to protest what we felt was a violation of civil liberties and our values of welcoming newcomers to our shores. We express the same dismay today that a similar proposal has advanced in the House.

We urge you to oppose passage of the SAFE Act and any other legislation that would criminalize the hospitality that is at the heart of our mission to love and welcome the newcomer. We are hopeful you will work with your colleagues in passing legislation that places greater emphasis on compassion, unity, and God's love for all seeking protection and opportunity.

Sincerely,

National Organizations and Leaders

Alliance of Baptists
American Jewish Committee
Anti-Defamation League
Church World Service
Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach
Comboni Missionaries
Conference of Major Superiors of Men
Congregation of St. Joseph
Disciples Center for Public Witness
Disciples Home Missions
Disciples Justice Action Network
Disciples Women
Dominican Sisters
The Episcopal Church
The Episcopal Network for Economic Justice
Franciscan Action Network
Franciscan Sisters Justice Commission
Franciscan Sisters of Atonement
The Hat Project
HIAS
Hispanic Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters - USA
Interfaith Immigration
Jesuit Refugee Service/USA
JPIC Network of the Sisters of St. Francis
Leadership Conference of Women Religious
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
Methodist Federation for Social Action

National Council of Jewish Women
National Justice for Our Neighbors
NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
PICO
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
The Rabbinical Assembly
Reconstructionist Rabbinical College
Secular Franciscan Order
The Shalom Center
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas
Sisters of the Precious Blood Community Council
Sojourners
Third Order Society of St. Francis
United Christian Church Disciples of Christ
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society
United Methodist Women
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
Union for Reform Judaism

State, Regional and Local Organizations and Leaders

Western United States

Jewish Labor Committee Western Region

Alabama

Alabama Coalition for Immigrant Justice
Greater Birmingham Ministries

Arizona

K. Kay Bircher, St. Charles Medical Center, NACC Chaplain Emeritus, Benson, AZ
Rev. Sherry S. Brady, Chair, Immigration Task Force, Desert Southwest Annual Conference of
the United Methodist Church
Rev. Ann Johnson, All Saints Episcopal Church

Arkansas

Arkansas Interfaith Alliance

California

Rev. Francisco Garcia, Director of Peace and Justice, All Saints Church, Pasadena, CA
Rev. Ed Bacon, Rector, All Saints Church, Pasadena, CA
Asian American Pacific Islander Christians for Social Justice
Rev. Mary Jo Bradshaw, Disciples of Christ Christian Church
Franciscans for Justice
Linda Kuruhara, Immigration Task Force of the California-Nevada Annual Conference
Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, Western American Province

Florida

Arlene Davidson, Public Action Network, National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of Jewish Women South Florida Coalition
Rev. Dr. Russell L. Meyer, Florida Council of Churches

Georgia

Rev. Dr. David Jenkins, United Methodist Church

Iowa

Sisters of St. Francis of Clinton, Iowa

Illinois

Carolee Caplan, Chair, Illinois State Policy Advocacy Committee, National Council of Jewish
Women
Chicago New Sanctuary Coalition
Rev. Michael Mann, Associate Director of Mission and Advocacy, Northern Illinois Conference

Kansas

Pam Owens

Louisiana

Louisiana State Policy Advocacy, National Council of Jewish Women

Maine

Patty Weber, State Policy Advocate, National Council of Jewish Women

Maryland

Rev. Joey Heath, United Methodist Church

Massachusetts

Boston New Sanctuary Movement
Rev. Terry Burke, First Church
Chaplain Dr. William Houghton, Boston
Jewish Alliance for Law & Social Action

Michigan

Michigan Catholics for the Common Good

Mississippi

Seashore Mission

Minnesota

Jewish Community Action

Missouri

Gospel Justice Committee, Sisters of the Most Precious Blood of O'Fallon

National Organization of Jewish Women, St. Louis Section

Montana

Montana Immigrant Justice Alliance
Montanans Support Immigration Reform

Nebraska

Rev. William Graham, St. Mary's-Holly Church, St. Joseph's Church
Victoria Osler, United Methodist Church, Nebraska
Andrea Paret, Risk-Taking Mission and Justice Ministries Team, Nebraska United Methodist
Conference
Judy Reimer, United Methodist

New Jersey

Kate Asselin, OFS, Our Lady of the Angels Region OFS (New York/New Jersey)
Assumption Fraternity, Secular Franciscans
Our Lady of the Angels Region
St. Benedict the Moor Fraternity
Saint Anthony of Padua Secular Franciscan Fraternity

New York

Kate Asselin, OFS, Our Lady of the Angels Region OFS (New York/New Jersey)
Mary Dugan, Peace & Justice Task Force, All Souls United Methodist Church
Rabbi Michael Feinberg, Director, Greater New York Labor-Religion Coalition
Immigration Task Force of the New York Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church
Migrants' Center
New York Korean Martyrs Fraternity
St. Benedict the Moor Fraternity
Servants of God, Secular Franciscan Order Fraternity
UUCSR

North Carolina

North Carolina Conference, United Methodist Church

Ohio

Congregation of St. Joseph, Cleveland
Sr. Karen J. Hartman, S.F.P. Office of US Area JPIC
George Marsh, Catholic Eucharistic Minister, lay Associate of the Sisters of St. Francis, Tiffin,
Ohio
Deanna Stickley-Miner, Director of Mission and Justice, West Ohio Conference, United
Methodist Church
Rev. Katy Wheat, West Ohio Conference, United Methodist Church
Ann Wheat, Worthington United Methodist Church

Oklahoma

Pastor Susanna Weslie Southard, United Methodist Church

Pennsylvania

HIAS Pennsylvania

Sister Dominica Lo Bianco, Hispanic Outreach

Sr. Frances C. Murray, Chair, Advocacy for Justice and Peace Committee of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia

Rev. Sandra L. Strauss, Director of Public Advocacy, Pennsylvania Council of Churches

Tennessee

Susan Montgomery, Chair, Church and Society Committee, Concord United Methodist Church
TIRRC

St. John United Methodist Church, Maryville

Texas

Arlington Proyecto Unido

Live Oak Unitarian Universalist Church, Austin TX

Mary Alice Garza, Chair, Social Action, United Methodist Women

Rev. Dr. Sid Hall III, Trinity United Methodist Church

Rebecca Lucas, Central Texas Conference Immigration Team, United Methodist Church

Pastor James Love, Bellaire United Methodist Church

Rev. Joe Miller, Servant United Methodist Church

Rev. Scott Moore, Texas Annual Conference United Methodist Church Immigration Task Force

Rev. Ruby Nelson, St. Paul's United Methodist-Beaumont

Rev. Ray Nelson, United Methodist Church

Larry L. Smith, Immigration Action Team, Live Oak Unitarian Universalist Church

Texas State Policy Advocacy, National Council of Jewish Women

Rev. Brian Wharton, Faith United Methodist Church

Virginia

Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Harlow, Enon United Methodist Church

Washington

Rev. Paul Benz, Faith Action Network

Rev. Diane Brelsford, Church of the Ascension, Seattle, WA

Pastor John-Otto Liljenstolpe, ELCA

Rev. Noemi P. Mena, Hispanic Ministry National City Christian Church

CC: Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-VA)

Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi

Rep. Bob Goodlatte, Chair, Committee on the Judiciary

Rep. John Conyers, Ranking Member, Committee on the Judiciary

Rep. Trey Gowdy, Chair, Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Immigration Policy and Border Security

Rep. Zoe Lofgren, Ranking Member, Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on
Immigration Policy and Border Security