

February 5, 2015

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Dear Members of Congress:

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The biblical tradition is one that instructs its followers to welcome strangers – as we welcome the stranger, we welcome Jesus himself. Mennonite Central Committee U.S. is committed to walking with immigrants and helping them through the many challenges they face. We see firsthand the results of a broken U.S. immigration system and the urgent need for reform. We are concerned that several recent policy proposals would lead to more family separations, less protections for vulnerable children and increased militarization of our border communities. The MCC U.S. Washington Office makes the following recommendations:

Reject legislation, including amendments to the DHS appropriations bill, which would stop or weaken the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Deferred Action for the Parents of Americans (DAPA) programs. Both programs are temporary and far from an ideal solution to the complex problems in our immigration system but, in the absence of congressional legislation, these programs will offer relief to millions of hardworking families facing separation. Millions of individuals – including many in Anabaptist congregations – live with the constant fear of being deported away from their loved ones.

Oppose H.R. 399, the Secure Our Borders First Act. This bill would require DHS to gain “operational control” of the border, a goal that is unrealistic and unworkable. H.R. 399 is opposed by all former DHS secretaries and the national Border Patrol union. It lacks accountability mechanisms that are sorely needed for the Border Patrol, which has seen increased problems with corruption, escalation of force and systemic abuse of migrants as it has doubled in size since 2004. And, it would exempt Border Patrol from various health and safety and environmental laws within 100 miles of the border. An effective border bill would increase accountability and work with border communities to help revitalize them, not further militarize them.

Oppose the Strengthen and Fortify Enforcement (SAFE Act) introduced last year, and any similar legislation that would make it a crime for church members to provide aid to immigrants, expand immigrant detention, and/or encourage state and local law enforcement officials to enforce immigration laws.

Reject changes that would rollback critical anti-trafficking protections for children and individuals seeking protection from persecution, including legislation similar to last year’s misnamed Protection of Children Act and The Asylum Reform and Border Protection Act. These bills would roll back protections in the bipartisan Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act and would result in many children being returned back into the hands of traffickers, gangs and others who seek to exploit them.

We pray that you consider the humanity of immigrants and the scriptural call to welcome the stranger and love our neighbors as you vote on these important issues. Rather than legislation that would tear families apart and spend billions of dollars on enforcement efforts that have proven ineffective and detrimental, we urge you to support policies that treat our neighbors with the dignity and respect that all children of God deserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rachelle Schlabach". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Rachelle" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Schlabach".

Rachelle Lyndaker Schlabach, Director
Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office

Mennonite Central Committee is the relief, development and peace agency of the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches in North America, working in 65 countries around the world.

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