



Rabbi Jonah Pesner
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Jennifer Brodkey Kaufman, Chair
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Dear Speaker Boehner and Majority Leader McConnell:

On behalf of the Union for Reform Judaism, whose over 900 congregations across North America include 1.5 million Reform Jews, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis, whose membership includes more than 2000 Reform rabbis, I write to share our support for just, compassionate and common sense immigration reform. I also urge you to oppose enforcement-only legislation or any measure that would undo recent immigration-related Executive Actions.

The Reform Movement has long advocated for a humane immigration system, reflecting the Jewish people's long history as strangers in countries where we were not always welcomed. These experiences, and our commitment to this nation that is itself a nation of immigrants, strongly inform our support for immigration policy that is compassionate and fair. We are also guided by the words of the Torah that teach us to reach out to and care for vulnerable populations, including non-citizens and resident aliens: "If your brother, being in straits, comes under your authority, and you hold him as though a resident alien, let him live by your side" (Leviticus 25:35).



The Religious Action Center pursues social justice and religious liberty by mobilizing the Jewish community and serving as its advocate in Washington, D.C. The Center is led by the Commission on Social Action of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Union for Reform Judaism (and its affiliates) and is supported by the congregations of the Union.



For all of these reasons, we oppose the Secure Our Borders First Act of 2015 (H.R. 399). Though it is essential to ensure the security of our nation's border, this should be part of a larger, comprehensive immigration reform bill that looks at these issues as part of the larger immigration challenges we face. We are also concerned that under this legislation, individuals living along the border could face increased inspection and racial profiling from police, Border Patrol, and even the National Guard, potentially violating constitutional rights under the Fourth Amendment.

I also urge you to reject legislation, including amendments to the DHS appropriations bill, that would stop, interfere or weaken the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Deferred Action for the Parents of Americans (DAPA) programs and other provisions made possible through recent executive orders on immigration.¹ While we would prefer and continue to advocate for a comprehensive, legislative approach to fixing our country's broken immigration system, the actions taken by President Obama are significant steps toward creating a more just, humane and secure immigration system. Together, they will enable people to come out of the shadows, allow communities to communicate openly with law enforcement and strengthen our national security, meet the needs of employers, and allow millions of immigrants and their families to live without fear of immediate

¹ www.whitehouse.gov/immigrationaction



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deportation. Those covered by these policies contribute to the emotional and financial well-being of their families. They are integral parts of their communities and relied on by their employers. In many cases, this country is the only one they have consciously known as home. Rolling back DACA and DAPA would be a significant mistake.

Similarly, we would oppose adoption of new legislation, like the Strengthen and Fortify Enforcement (SAFE Act / H.R. 2278) introduced last year, which would expand interior immigration enforcement efforts. Through the inspiring work of Rabbis Organizing Rabbis (ROR), a social justice initiative of the Reform Jewish Movement, we have worked to lift up the cases of certain individuals with deep connections to the United States who are at risk of deportation and urge that their orders of deportation be deferred, often with faith communities offering sanctuary. As such, we oppose efforts to create new crimes for immigrants and individuals, including clergy, who provide them aid; expand immigration detention; or decrease protections and immigration relief for certain migrant groups.

The Protection of Children Act and the Asylum Reform and Border Protection Act, introduced in the last congress as H.R. 5143 and H.R. 5137, respectively, are also cause for serious concern. These bills would roll back the bipartisan Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) signed into law by President Bush.



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They would deprive children of the opportunity to seek protection and legal relief through requesting asylum. As Reform Jews, we value protecting the most vulnerable in our society, children chief among them. The humanitarian crisis that prompted the introduction of these bills last year requires a comprehensive response in accordance with our values.

I hope that you will prioritize fixing our immigration system through measures that are compassionate, effective and reflect common-sense values. Rather than legislation that will seriously disrupt our economy and employers nationwide, while also tearing families apart, dashing the hopes of young people, and keeping those who wish to contribute to our nation's strength and security in the shadows, I urge you to support immigration policies that treat every individual with the dignity and respect that all people deserve. I look forward to working with you to achieve these goals in the days and months ahead.

Respectfully,

Rabbi Jonah Pesner

CC: Members of the 114th Congress