



## USCCB Committee on Migration

C/O MIGRATION AND REFUGEE SERVICES

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April 19, 2007

Dear Senator:

I write to express the position of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) on comprehensive immigration reform legislation, which may soon be considered by Congress.

As you may know, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) strongly supports the enactment of comprehensive immigration reform legislation. In our view, any reform legislation must include a viable path to permanent residency for the undocumented population; a new worker program that includes appropriate worker protections, wage levels, and an opportunity to earn permanent residency; reductions in family reunification backlogs; the restoration of due process protections lost in the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA); and policies that address the root causes of migration, such as economic development in sending countries.

To date in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, H.R. 1645, the Security Through Regularized Immigration and a Vibrant Economy Act of 2007 (STRIVE), bipartisan legislation introduced by Representatives Luis Gutierrez (D-IL) and Jeff Flake (R-AZ), best comports with the principles needed for a just and humane immigration reform bill. The legislation contains a viable program for legalizing the undocumented population and giving them an opportunity for permanent residency, a new worker program with appropriate worker protections and wages, and reductions in family immigration backlogs.

We have some concerns about several provisions in Title II of the legislation, which we hope will be addressed during the legislative process. For example, we believe that passport fraud provisions found in section 221 of the measure would place bona fide refugees at risk, many of whom must resort to the use of false travel documents obtained in their home country because they cannot obtain government documents from authorities that may be persecuting them. We also object to aspects of section 234 c of the bill that seeks to deal with penalties for persons who harbor and smuggle aliens. Although the section would exempt religious organizations from some of its penalties, it would place other groups and individuals, including labor unions, at risk of prosecution for providing basic needs assistance to undocumented immigrants. We believe these and other provisions in Title II should be removed from the legislation or substantially modified.

Despite these reservations, we believe the STRIVE Act contains the right structure and formula to effectively address our immigration crisis.

While we are encouraged by the direction of the immigration debate with the introduction of the STRIVE Act, we are deeply concerned by the Administration's most recent proposal for

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comprehensive immigration reform. Unlike the STRIVE Act, which promotes family reunification and has a realistic plan for bringing undocumented immigrants out of the shadows, the Administration's proposal would make cuts to family-based immigration as well as impose fines and wait-times for legalization that are far beyond what most immigrants could bear. As we understand it, the Administration's proposal would effectively leave many immigrants seeking to legalize their status in a permanent underclass and would encourage family breakdown in immigrant communities. Although we appreciate the President's initiative in encouraging comprehensive immigration reform, we see this proposal as a step in the wrong direction.

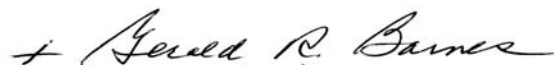
Under the plan, undocumented persons eligible for what would be a new "Z" visa would have to pay \$3,500 every three years to renew their visa and another \$10,000 once they become eligible for permanent residency. This could discourage immigrants, especially those of low income, and their families from participating in the process, make them vulnerable to persons who would exploit them in return for obtaining the funds necessary to navigate the process, and relegate them to a permanent underclass of residents without full rights in our society.

The Administration plan also would transform our immigration system from a family-based system to an employment-based system by eliminating or limiting four categories of family preference (adult sons and daughters of U.S. citizens, brothers and sisters of U.S. citizens, parents of U.S. citizens and some children of permanent residents). It also would prevent participants in the proposed new "Z" visa program from petitioning for family members and prevent temporary workers in the "Y" nonimmigrant visa program from bringing their immediate family members to the United States.

These are a few of several troubling proposals in the Administration plan.

In conclusion, I ask that you reject the approach suggested by the Administration plan and embrace the elements of reform we have outlined, best embodied in H.R. 1645, the STRIVE Act.

Sincerely,



Most Reverend Gerald R. Barnes  
Bishop of San Bernardino  
Chairman, USCCB Committee on Migration