

# INTERFAITH IMMIGRATION COALITION

## Interfaith Immigration Coalition Members

African American Ministers in Action  
American Friends Service Committee  
American Jewish Committee  
Bread for the World Institute  
Church World Service  
Columban Center for Advocacy & Outreach  
Disciples Justice Action Network  
(Disciples of Christ)  
The Episcopal Church  
Franciscan Action Network  
Friends Committee on National Legislation  
Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society  
Interfaith Worker Justice  
Irish Apostolate USA  
Islamic Information Center  
Jesuit Refugee Service  
Jewish Council for Public Affairs  
Leadership Conference of Women Religious  
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service  
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns  
Mennonite Central Committee U.S.  
Washington Office  
Muslim Public Affairs Council  
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of  
the Good Shepherd  
NETWORK, A Catholic Social Justice Lobby  
Pax Christi USA  
PICO National Network  
Presbyterian Church USA, Immigration  
Issues Offices  
Union for Reform Judaism  
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas  
Sojourners  
3P Human Security  
Unitarian Universalist Association of  
Congregations  
United Church of Christ, Justice and  
Witness Ministries  
United Methodist Church, General Board of  
Church and Society  
UNITED SIKHS  
World Relief

The Interfaith Immigration Coalition (IIC), a coalition of 35 national faith-based organizations, calls on the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress to reform of our broken immigration system. For more than a decade, the IIC has been working with hundreds of congregations, service providers, and faith leaders across the country to educate communities, oppose anti-immigrant legislation, and work toward humane immigration reform. In the past four years alone, the IIC network has organized more than a thousand prayer vigils, community forums, and rallies across the country in support of immigrants' rights. As a diverse coalition, we see this as an opportunity to raise issues that should be considered as Congress moves forward with fixing our nation's broken immigration system. The IIC calls on Congress to enact legislation that will:

### **Address the Causes of Migration**

People of faith have witnessed firsthand the suffering caused by extreme poverty, violent conflict, political and religious persecution, and environmental destruction that prompt individuals to leave their homes in search of a better life. U.S. foreign policy must seek smart, effective ways to help reshape financial systems that unduly burden vulnerable populations – including U.S. trade policies, international financial institutions, and local economies in sending countries – toward models that support those in need.

Our faiths compel us to seek to reduce the need for people to leave their homes in order to provide for their families. Rather than current policies which undermine sustainable livelihoods in sending countries, we should invest in environmentally sustainable economic development that preserves and defends the basic human rights of all people. These policies will provide alternatives to unauthorized immigration and reduce the need for costly border enforcement, detention, and deportation.

### **Create a Process for Undocumented Immigrants to Earn Citizenship**

Any meaningful reform of our immigration system must include a fair and generous process that allows undocumented immigrants and their families to earn lawful permanent residency with a pathway to citizenship. The workability of such a program should not be hindered by overly punitive criteria, such as mandating that immigrants leave the country or pay exorbitant fees, or by making the process conditional upon the implementation of enforcement measures. We urge members of Congress to oppose legislation that would curtail the nature of citizenship or restrict access to public benefits and child tax credits.

### **Keep Families Together**

Families are the basic unit of strong communities. Today, thousands of families are separated by our broken immigration system and should be reunited. Backlogs at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and the limited number of visas force family members to choose between being separated for extended periods of time or illegally entering the country. A fair immigration system must improve and strengthen the family immigration process by recapturing visas lost to bureaucratic delay to reduce the current backlog; reclassifying spouses and minor children of lawful permanent residents as immediate relatives; raising the per country visa limits from seven to ten percent of total admissions to reduce long wait times for certain nationalities; eliminating unlawful presence bars for the spouse, child, or parent of U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents; admitting surviving family members of deceased family petitioners; and eliminating the cap on the total number of family-based visas available.

### **Enact the *Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act***

The faith community sees the DREAM Act as vital in fixing the broken immigration system. The DREAM Act has had many iterations, and the IIC calls on Congress to enact robust and inclusive legislation that would provide a pathway to citizenship for individuals brought to the United States at age 16 or

younger, are currently no older than 35 years of age, and who have graduated from high school, earned a GED in the U.S, or are currently in school. In addition to college and military service criteria, the IIC urges legislators to include volunteer service as a method by which DREAMers can maintain legal status and earn citizenship. DACA recipients should automatically qualify for any legalization process, and their time with DACA status should count toward any conditional status period under the DREAM Act.

### **Protect Workers' Rights, Including Agricultural Workers**

There is a clear need to expand legal avenues for workers to migrate to the United States in a safe, authorized, and orderly manner. It is vital that these workers' rights are fully protected, including the right to bring their families with them, travel as needed, change their place of employment, and apply for lawful permanent residency and eventually citizenship.

Enactment of AgJobs (the *Agricultural Job Opportunities, Benefits and Security Act*) would provide a legal, stable labor force by offering undocumented farmworkers the chance to earn legal status by meeting stringent work requirements and legal obligations. AgJobs would revise the H-2A agricultural guest-worker program to help employers fill critical agricultural positions that have been difficult to fill, sustaining agricultural industries while also protecting workers' rights.

As currently structured, the electronic employment verification (E-verify) program has proven detrimental to migrants, employers, and citizen employees. It leads to increased discrimination and unfair hiring and firing practices. For these reasons, and because we believe all workers benefit from the enforcement of health, safety, wage, and hour laws, as well as the right to peacefully organize, the IIC is opposed to the mandatory expansion of the E-verify program.

### **Place Humanitarian Values at the Center of Enforcement Policies**

Enforcement policies must be made to be consistent with humanitarian values and with the need to treat all individuals with respect, while allowing the United States to identify and prevent the entry of persons who commit dangerous crimes. Over the past twenty years, the federal government has dramatically increased border fence and other infrastructure construction, border patrol presence, immigration detention, and the deportation of immigrants, without regard to cost or effectiveness. Over \$10 billion of taxpayers' money has been spent on border security. It is now time to reform the broken immigration system. To truly decrease unauthorized immigration, the United States should improve access to a fair and humane legal immigration system, increasing and improving the efficiency of ports of entry, expanding visa availability, and eliminating application backlogs.

Border security has also proven to be environmentally irresponsible on many levels. It threatens already endangered species and damages public lands and interferes with business and land owners who operate and live along the border. We have also witnessed the desecration of sacred sites and the violation of religious freedom, as well as the unnecessary anguish of community members whose loved ones have suffered or died seeking entry into the United States. Above all else, enforcement policies must treat all individuals with respect and dignity. Citizens and migrants alike have the right to a fair and humane legal immigration system that respects the dignity of all persons, prioritizes the cohesiveness of families and communities, recognizes the economic contributions of immigrants, and upholds our moral obligations to provide refuge and welcome for the sojourner.

### **Protect Refugees and Migrant Survivors of Violence**

The IIC encourages Congress to make life-changing improvements to the U.S. refugee resettlement program that would help refugees integrate in their new homes in the United States. Refugees have fled persecution into their home countries due to their race, nationality, religion, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group, and the United States has a rich tradition of welcoming refugees and helping them begin new lives. Bills such as the *Refugee Protection Act*, *Domestic Refugee Resettlement and Modernization Act*, and *Strengthening Refugee Resettlement Act* include positive reforms that would not only help refugees, but provide important resources to the communities that welcome them.

The *Violence Against Women Act* (VAWA) has a long history of uniting lawmakers with the common purpose of protecting survivors of domestic violence. Congress has consistently recognized the vulnerability of non-citizen survivors of violence by enacting provisions in VAWA that enhance safety for survivors and their children and provide tools for law enforcement to investigate and prosecute crimes. In 2012, the House of Representatives passed a VAWA reauthorization bill that would undermine years of protections for immigrant victims and would actually make immigrants more vulnerable, endangering many lives. The IIC urges that any reauthorization of VAWA maintain and improve protections for migrant survivors, not weaken them.