



Purpose of the Visit

Ask Congress to **oppose anti-immigrant attacks** and **pass comprehensive immigration reform**.

What our Faith Tells Us

Catholic Social Teaching tells us that it is our “duty to welcome the foreigner out of charity and respect for the dignity and rights of the human person.” (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops) As members of the Ignatian Solidarity Network, we stand with the U.S. Catholic Bishops and the U.S. Jesuit Provincials in asking for immigration reform that supports family unity and a pathway to citizenship.

Personal Testimony (if applicable)

Personalize the issue by sharing your story or the story of someone directly affected by our nation’s broken immigration system, who may be a family member, classmate, or friend.

What We See

Families and Communities Torn Apart: Our faith recognizes family as the cornerstone of our communities, but hundreds of thousands of families are separated by our broken immigration system. Backlogs at USCIS of up to 22 years and the insufficient number of family-based visas force family members to choose between being separated for extended periods of time or entering the country without documentation. (Bread for the World)

Talent Wasted: Catholic Social Teaching directly states that all people have a right and duty to participate in society for the common good, and that we must provide avenues for participation in the U.S. Many immigrants hope to pursue higher education, join the military, or enter the workforce, but their lack of legal status jeopardizes those dreams and exposes them to deportation. Administrative relief through expanded Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and implementation of a new program called Deferred Action for Parents of Americans (DAPA) is currently being halted by a federal court in Texas.

Value of Work Denied and Workers Exploited: Much of our U.S. economy is dependent on migrant labor. These men and women are an integral part of the U.S. economy and there is a general failure to recognize their value. Because migrants live in the shadows of society with no pathway to obtaining citizenship, they are often subject to exploitation that is inconsistent with the Catholic Social Teaching principle of the dignity of work.

Immigrants Unjustly Detained: Almost half a million immigrants are placed into immigration detention annually in a network of over 250 county and state jails, for-profit prisons, and federally administered facilities. Congress has mandated an immigration detention bed quota requiring ICE to lock-up an average of 34,000 immigrants in detention on any given day. People placed in these jail-like facilities have no right to free court-appointed attorneys, and people seeking asylum, immigrants who might have a right to stay in the U.S. through family connections, and others who are in need of legal help often are forced to face our complicated and broken immigration system without a lawyer. (Detention Watch Network)

Crossing the border was once a matter for civil immigration courts but is now handled in federal criminal courts along the border. Under this program, known as Operation Streamline, people caught crossing the border are criminally charged with either unauthorized entry (a misdemeanor) or unauthorized re-entry (a felony). This practice has swelled the ranks of our federal prisons so that in border districts, half of those incarcerated are now there for immigration related offenses alone. (Grassroots Leadership)

The use of so-called “family detention” where mothers, toddlers, babies, and children are locked up in jail-like facilities has surged since 2014. Seeking to deter Central American refugees and migrants from journeying to the United States, the Obama Administration has placed thousands of Central American women, infants, toddlers, and children in prison camps even though the vast majority of these women and children are seeking asylum. A federal judge has ordered the release of these children, but the Obama Administration has filed an appeal in the case. (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops)

There are humane and cost-effective alternatives to detention, such as the community-based case management systems that allow immigrants to live in supportive and safe environments while service providers guide them through the immigration court process, ensuring they make their court dates.

Suffering Ignored and Legal Rights Denied: We must treat all people with dignity and respect, and our asylum and refugee system is under threat. Rather than offering protection and compassion for those who have been forced to flee from their countries of origin, our system treats them as potential terrorists, and subjects them to lengthy delays in having their cases decided and blocks entrance into the U.S. through punitive enforcement measures. (Jesuit Refugee Service/USA)

An Increasingly Militarized Border: Catholic Social Teaching calls us to promote peace and disarmament, which includes respect and cooperation between nations in addition to the absence of war. The misguided border militarization of the last decade has cost \$100 billion and doubled the size of the Border Patrol. Border Patrol’s growth has happened in the absence of sufficient screening of new hires, and inadequate training and accountability leading to rampant levels of abuse, corruption and human rights violations by our nation’s largest law enforcement agency. One-third of deported migrants surveyed in a study published by the Kino Border Initiative and the Jesuit Conference reported having been abused by Border Patrol, including assault, racial slurs, denial of medical care, and poor conditions in holding facilities. (Jesuit Conference/Kino Border Initiative)

Solutions

The U.S. government can fix the broken immigration system and support a more humane and logical system by passing comprehensive immigration reform rather than supporting legislation that devalues immigrants and the contributions they make to society. **Passing humane comprehensive immigration reform would:**

Protect the Vulnerable:

- 16.6 million people are in “mixed-status” families—those with at least one member who is undocumented. Nine million of these families have at least one U.S.-born child. (Pew Research Hispanic Center)
- Creating a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants helps keep families together, and prevents children from needlessly being placed in foster care. (Source: Applied Research Center)
- Refugees, asylum-seekers, and stateless people will face a fairer, more efficient system that respects human dignity. (USCCB)

Reduce Future Undocumented Immigration:

The only way to reduce undocumented immigration is to ensure that people seeking work and family reunification can enter legally. For undocumented immigrants who are already here, we must provide a realistic way for them to work toward citizenship while passing background checks, learning English, and paying taxes if they aren't already. Our faith teaches us that people have a right to migrate; this is not amnesty. It is the only smart, practical, faithful way to deal with the approximately 11 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S.

Create Safe and Humane Communities:

Creating safe communities means ensuring that the enforcement of immigration law is professional, accountable, and humane. It also means allowing local law enforcement officials to focus on laws, leaving civil code to immigration enforcement officials. This includes more robust and transparent oversight of all agencies responsible for enforcement measures (USCIS, CBP, and ICE) and a change in detention and deportation practices to preserve immigrants' dignity and safety. These changes should also eliminate nighttime deportations, keeping families together during the deportation process, and allowing NGOs to access Customs and Border Patrol facilities. (Jesuit Conference/Kino Border Initiative)

Improve the Economy:

As legalization and naturalization of undocumented immigrants bolsters their wages, helps bring families out of poverty, and increases tax revenue, it will strengthen our economy and reduce our budget deficit.

Our Requests

Will the Congressperson publically support and vote for legislation that upholds the following principles?

- Ensures the human rights of immigrant families and border communities are respected by immigration enforcement agencies;
- Protects the most vulnerable, especially refugees and asylum seekers;
- Works to maintain family unity in all elements of the immigration system;
- Respects the rights of U.S. and immigrant workers;
- Leads to long-term comprehensive reform that includes an accessible pathway to citizenship for all 11 million people without documentation;
- Provides access to higher education for DREAMer students.

Will the Congressperson be vocal in opposition of legislation that devalues immigrants and the contributions they make to our communities and economy?

- Oppose bills proposing the elimination of funding for sanctuary cities and other welcoming programs
- End programs and protocols such as Operation Streamline, the detention bed mandate, family detention and place resources saved into cost-effective community-based alternatives to detention
- Protect DACA as we wait for legislative solutions to our broken immigration system