

May 16, 2013

Senator Maria Cantwell
Senator Patty Murray
Representative Suzan DelBene
Representative Doc Hastings
Representative Denny Heck
Representative Jaime Herrera Beutler
Representative Derek Kilmer
Representative Rick Larsen
Representative Jim McDermott
Representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Representative David G. Reichert
Representative Adam Smith

Dear Members of the Washington Congressional Delegation:

The undersigned faith communities and individuals in Washington State urge you to support just and humane comprehensive immigration reform legislation this year. We are encouraged by the recent introduction of comprehensive immigration reform legislation in Congress and are eager to work with you to ensure that the final legislation is both comprehensive and upholds the principle of family unity and of human dignity.

Every human being has a God-given dignity that must be upheld and affirmed in any proposed legislation. In the Hebrew Scriptures we read, "So you, too, must befriend the stranger, for you were once strangers yourself in the land of Egypt." (Deuteronomy 10:17-19). Our faith compels us to evaluate legislation from the lens of compassionate solidarity with those who remain in the shadows, separated from loved ones, who struggle to survive and who migrate to feed their families and contribute to society. We note also that many have come to the United States as refugees from violence, fleeing persecution or otherwise seeking religious freedom to live in peace for themselves and for their children. God's love knows no exclusions; a reform that is generous, inclusive, humane, workable and achievable is within our reach. We urge civil discussion, transparent negotiations and prompt action toward completion of this necessary and long-overdue comprehensive reform.

We urge our congressional delegation to uphold the following policy goals in any comprehensive immigration reform legislation and address critical issues in the legislation proposed to date.

- **A generous, common sense legalization program** that embraces the vast majority of undocumented immigrants and their families so that they may be brought out of the shadows and afforded an opportunity to fully integrate into our society. Such a program should avoid exorbitant fees or be hindered by overly punitive criteria. As we express serious concerns about "triggers" or contingencies required around enforcement that would precede advancement of the immigration process, it needs to be noted that it is the yet-to-be naturalized immigrants themselves who live a "contingent" existence and urge that reform expeditiously alleviate this ongoing vulnerability.
- **A certain and timely path to citizenship.** Comprehensive immigration reform legislation must be vigilant against relegating legalized immigrants into a permanent second-class status. It must

fully embrace those immigrants who legalize and aspire to citizenship. We urge a shorter time frame for the path to permanent residency and citizenship. We request equitable access to reasonable health and well-being benefits without a potential 15-year wait, especially given the unnecessarily stringent work requirements that also need amendment. We respectfully insist that eligibility should not be contingent upon enforcement issues contained in the legislation. We are encouraged that current proposals include expedited processes for DREAM-eligible youth and agricultural workers.

- **An opportunity to reunite families.** Legislation should create a path for those immigrants who have been deported under current immigration enforcement policies to return to be with their loved ones. Family separation has taken a tremendous emotional and financial toll on families, many of whom have lived in the United States for years. It is now time to ensure that such families can be reunited. Furthermore, immigrants who have returned to the United States illegally in order to be with their families should not be unduly penalized as part of a legalization program. As one bishop has noted: “The need to preserve family unity is the cornerstone of the nation’s immigration system”.
- **A commitment to America’s family immigration system.** Congress must follow through on S. 744’s commitment to reduce current family immigration backlogs that have forced millions of family members to wait, in some cases for more than two decades, to be united with their family members in the United States. Congress must also reject policy proposals that pit family-based immigration against employment-based immigration. Family-based immigration is part of the genius of America’s ability to integrate immigrants into our society, and can also be a strong driver of small business development and growth in America’s communities. Siblings and adult children of permanent residents and citizens should also have the opportunity to reunite with loved ones. This is also an important opportunity to remove bars on re-entry to this country for the family members of U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents.
- **A commitment to recognizing the human dignity of immigrants in immigration enforcement policies.** Countless families have been separated through various enforcement policies absent comprehensive legislation. The \$18 billion invested in FY 2012 alone in federal immigration enforcement coupled with the economic recession has led to greatly reduced successful unauthorized border crossings. The further ramping up of border enforcement suggests a potential misapplication of scarce immigration and naturalization resources. Additionally, the reassertion of federal law as superseding state and local laws will be important for immigrants and their U.S. citizen family members who have experienced racial profiling, constant fear of separation, and have lost faith in local law enforcement. 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.
- **Dignity of work.** Maintaining fundamental rights that apply to all workers in the workplace is critical to ensure that workers are not exploited during their provisional status. The portability of employment, the payment of fair wages, and the protection of back pay for those who leave employment all will assist in workers staying out of the shadows and continuing to contribute to our economy, while allowing for opportunity in the future. E-Verify should be tested thoroughly without requiring it to be fully in place in order to proceed with the bulk of permanent residency

applications. Let us recall that immigrant labor, authorized and unauthorized, has formed the backbone of our economy.

People of faith have witnessed firsthand in our congregations, neighborhoods, fields, service industries and businesses 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. We must recognize that migration to our own nation is often a consequence of our own foreign and bi-national policies. As we work to create legal alternatives to unauthorized immigration, let us also consider the importance of defending human rights and sustainable economic development in countries of origin.

We are eager to work with you to enact common sense and comprehensive immigration reform legislation that is also just and humane.

Sincerely,

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Bishop of Olympia

Bishop Grant Hagiya
Pacific Northwest Conference
United Methodist Church

Rev. Wm. Chris Boerger, Bishop
NW Washington Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Rev. Marcia J. Patton, Executive Minister
Evergreen Association of
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Rev. Michael Denton
Pacific NW Conference Minister
United Church of Christ

Rev. Sandy Messick, Regional Minister
NW Regional Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)

Rev. Christopher Morton, Executive Director
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Rev. Angela Ying, Senior Pastor
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Very Rev. Michael G. Ryan, Pastor
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