



**American Friends
Service Committee**

February 19, 2015

Dear Speaker Boehner, Majority Leader McConnell, and all Representatives and Senators,

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is an almost 100-year old faith-based organization grounded in the Quaker belief in the dignity and worth of every person. For much of that century of history we have worked with immigrant communities in the United States, experience that has reaffirmed our belief that the basis of U.S. immigration law should be the protection of human rights and equal opportunity. As you consider changes to U.S. immigration policy please oppose any legislation that tears families apart, militarizes our southern border, violates Constitutional and international laws, and criminalizes immigrants. Federal policies rooted in such punitive approaches to migration result in irreversible damage to the fragile fabric of our society and cause immense suffering.

Republicans and Democrats alike agree that the current laws are untenable. Communities of faith are united in the call for broad immigration policy reforms that honor our shared humanity. The time has come to fix our harmful and exploitative immigration system – immigrants can no longer wait for relief while Congress plays politics with their lives. In the 114th Congress we ask that you support legislation reflecting our values of fairness, justice and due process for all.

AFSC and the communities directly impacted by U.S. immigration practices with which we partner suggest the following principles for immigration reform in the 114th Congress:

Create a clear path to citizenship prioritizing unifying all family members. The historical cornerstone of U.S. immigration policy since 1965 has been bringing together families on U.S. soil. Despite this, many immigrant families experience painfully long separations and families already in the U.S. are divided by detention and deportation. With no pathway to permanent residency or U.S. citizenship, immigrants are left living in the shadows, vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Any changes to current laws and policies must strengthen the reunification of families, shorten separation periods, and extend immigration benefits equally to same-gender and heterosexual partners.

Federal budgets should improve the quality-of-life for border communities and respect the human and civil rights of all people regardless of where they call “home”. Since the establishment of new border control policies in 1993, the Border Patrol has generated a

culture of cruelty that operates with impunity, disregard for the law, and inadequate oversights. Residents are regularly subjected to racial profiling¹, surveillance, and unconstitutional searches and seizures.² Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers stand accused of excessive uses of force, killings, sexual violence, failing to identify immigrants eligible for international protections and corruption.³ Throwing funds at a failed border policy rooted in violence and fear is irresponsible and immoral. AFSC is particularly concerned by H.R. 399, the "Secure Our Borders First Act". H.R. 399 doubles down on the military footprint along the border, undermines the rights of those seeking asylum in the U.S., establishes unrealistic enforcement targets, and will cost U.S. taxpayers over \$4 billion.⁴ Furthermore, the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security opposes H.R. 399 because it "is extreme to the point of being unworkable".⁵ Instead of pursuing expensive and failed policies harming communities, Congress should pursue legislation addressing oversight of CBP activities and personnel, increasing transparency of its operations, and expanding accountability for breaches of law.

Address root causes of migration. Economic policies and agreements such as NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement) devastate poor communities and force millions of people to migrate in order to survive. Immigrants also flee their homes in fear of criminal networks and violence in their communities. Policies must address the underlying, root causes of migration so those most brutally impacted by economic despair and crises are not further punished.

Protect labor, civil and human rights for all residents. All people in the U.S. regardless of immigration status have a right to work with dignity but immigrant workers are often denied this right. We must end harmful policies and actions exposing workers to abuse and exploitation, such as Electronic Employment Eligibility System (E-Verify) and guest worker programs. Current U.S. laws criminalize immigrants and migration by allowing the arrest, detention, and deportation of people based on their immigration status. U.S. law and legal practice must be changed to protect these fundamental human rights for all people, regardless of immigration status.

Cease programs requiring local law enforcement officials to enforce federal immigration laws, such as the "Secure Communities" program. Legislation such as H.R. 2278 (the "SAFE Act") distracts local law enforcement from their primary mission: protecting local communities. Forcing law enforcement with overseeing immigration laws makes our communities are less safe, not more secure. These policies undermine trusting relationships between local officers and the populations they are tasked with protecting, including immigrants. When an immigrant is victimized by crime they may fear seeking help from police that cooperate with ICE.⁶ Local law enforcement should be able to focus on keeping their community safe, free of federal law enforcement obligations.

¹ <https://www.aclu.org/blog/immigrants-rights-racial-justice/dangerous-precedent-why-allow-racial-profiling-or-near-border>

² <https://www.aclu.org/immigrants-rights/constitution-100-mile-border-zone>

³ http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/10/border-patrol-the-green-monster-112220_Page2.html#.VOKXLrwrF0p

⁴ <http://www.cbo.gov/publication/49913>

⁵ <http://www.dhs.gov/news/2015/01/22/statement-secretary-jeh-c-johnson-concerning-hr-399-secure-our-border-first-act-2015>

⁶ <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/05/14/us-immigrants-afraid-call-911>

End mandatory detention policies and the "bed quota". Through a policy of mandatory detention, any non-citizen can be imprisoned without individualized review, including asylum seekers, torture survivors, and legal permanent residents.⁷ Mandatory detention destroys families, results in primary wage earners losing their jobs and takes parents from children. This practice also relates to the immigration "bed quota" policy, requiring that on any given day at least 34,000 immigrants be incarcerated. This quota is an outlier in U.S. policy in that no other federal agency follows such a practice.⁸ Setting and maintaining a certain number of people behind bars is wrong. Sadly, those subjected to detention continue to be abused in detention facilities where they are subjected to poor conditions in violation of U.S. and international laws.⁹

AFSC encourages you to undertake meaningful reforms with renewed vigor and a firm dedication to respect for all humans. We encourage your support for policies preserving family unity, honoring fundamental rights, ending mandatory detentions and halting militarization of our borders.

Sincerely,



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American Friends Service Committee

⁷<http://www.detentionwatchnetwork.org/sites/detentionwatchnetwork.org/files/MD%20factsheet%209-25-11-FINAL.pdf>

⁸ Id.

⁹ <http://www.ushrnetwork.org/sites/ushrnetwork.org/files/03-immigration-afsc.pdf>