



Comprehensive Immigration Reform

Update: The Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006 (S.2611) passed in the Senate on Thursday, May 25 by a vote of 62-36. [Click here](#) for a statement by LIRS President Ralston Deffenbaugh.

Action: Please [click here](#) to find out how your senators voted. Then call your senators to thank those who voted for the act, and to remind those who voted against it that you want your community to be a welcoming one for hardworking migrants. [Click here](#) for contact information

LIRS continues to advocate for reform of our broken immigration system, working with our partners and diverse groups across the political spectrum including business, labor, faith-based, civil and human rights groups and immigrants themselves. The U.S. government has the sovereign responsibility to establish a viable immigration system consistent with our values as an immigrant nation and nation of laws. We recall that these newcomers are God's children, too, who often have fled to the United States because political, social and economic conditions in their home countries made it impossible for them to provide for their families and maintain their human dignity. As we enter a critical stage of the reform debate, we recall our faith tradition and family histories, "You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 23.9, NRSV).

As the debate on reform heats up, LIRS continues to support the "Secure America and Orderly Immigration Act of 2005" (S. 1033, H.R. 2330), bi-partisan legislation often referred to as the McCain-Kennedy bill. LIRS would likewise support other emerging legislation that goes a long way to fulfilling LIRS's four principles described below.

LIRS opposes the "Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act" (H.R. 4437), passed by the House in December 2005. H.R. 4437 would not only fail to fix the broken system, but would cause great harm to the most vulnerable immigrants and refugees, including unaccompanied children, asylum seekers, torture survivors and families fractured by current immigration policy. In particular, it would criminalize many vulnerable migrants. It would also criminalize much of the Good Samaritan outreach that churches and social service agencies do to the most vulnerable migrants.

Senator Specter has proposed a new bill, the "Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006," which contains many of the objectionable measures contained in H.R. 4437. While it does include provisions to bring undocumented migrants out of the shadows, the provisions are not as comprehensive as those in the McCain-Kennedy bill. LIRS advocates passage of McCain-Kennedy, and is working to bring Senator Specter's bill more into line with McCain-Kennedy.

Our Broken Immigration System

There are 10.3 million undocumented people in the United States. (1) Who are they and why are they here? As has always been the case, these are people who migrated here for family, work and freedom—to unite with loved ones, to take up employment or to seek refuge from persecution. They are often the same honest, hardworking people who take care of our parents and children, clean our offices and harvest our food. They come and remain here to carry out vital services for our communities, doing jobs for which there are not enough U.S. workers. Nonetheless, the system does

SEARCH

NOTICE Regarding Congressional Mail

Increased security is slowing down congressional mail. Letter delivery to Congress will take approximately one month. Don't let that keep you from writing! Fax or e-mail your letters instead. If you must mail a letter, send it to the Washington, D.C., office not to the home state office. Follow up with a phone call via the Capitol switchboard at 202/224-3121. Posted June 4, 2004

Read More

[Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Statement Regarding Immigration Concerns](#) (outside link)

[Evangelical Lutherans Call for Fair and Just Immigration Reform](#) (Statement from ELCA Bishop Mark Hanson and LIRS President Ralston Deffenbaugh) (PDF)

[Backgrounder on Comprehensive Immigration Reform](#) (MS Word doc)

Listen In

LIRS President Deffenbaugh was recently interviewed by George Carden United News & Information. Their conversation about comprehensive immigration reform was distributed to hundreds of radio stations nationwide. We've spliced together some MP3 clips from that interview, each about 1.4 MB and each about a minute and a half long:

[Carden/Deffenbaugh Interview Clips: Part 1](#) | [Part 2](#)

CONTACT CONGRESS

Enter your ZIP code in the field below and press "GO"

Courtesy of Capitol Advantage



Give now to support the work of LIRS.

not provide a viable way for these individuals to receive proper documentation. As a result, they often work for unfair wages in unsafe conditions, marginalized from the rest of society and separated from their families. We carefully consider these injustices and also the common good, “The existence of a permanent sub-group of people who live without recourse to effective legal protection opens the door for their massive abuse and exploitation and harms the common good.” (2) Any reform must acknowledge that these newcomers are integral to our communities and interwoven into the economic, cultural and political fabric of our society. It must also acknowledge that as a nation of immigrants and of laws we must be humane and just to newcomers while assuring orderly migration.

Four Essential Principles for Immigration Reform

To meet the needs of migrants and of America, meaningful reform must include four principles:

- uniting families;
- protecting human rights and worker rights;
- ending the marginalization of the undocumented, making it possible for those working “below the radar” to live freely and openly in our society; and
- giving immigrants willing to contribute to our economy and society a path toward citizenship.

Uniting families—Family unity has always been a cornerstone of U.S. immigration policy and of advocacy of many faith-based groups. LIRS’s “advocacy will continue to insist that family reunification should be the primary objective of immigration laws.” (3) Currently, undocumented people who are doing vital jobs in our communities rarely have a viable legal avenue to obtain immigration papers for themselves and their families. Even documented immigrants and refugees often have only protracted means to unite with their families. The current backlog of family preference visas, for example, makes U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents wait up to 20 years to reunite with their families. (4) Comprehensive immigration reform can ensure that family unity policy is strengthened, both for undocumented people who receive earned adjustment and for those already in the system.

Protecting rights—Migrant workers experience lower wages, exploitative labor practices and dangerous working conditions, and live in constant fear and insecurity. Providing legal documents for honest, hardworking migrants would discourage such abuses of human rights and worker rights.

Ending marginalization—While the United States has the sovereign responsibility to control its borders, it must also create migration policies consistent with its constitutional and humanitarian values. By bringing people out of the shadows of marginalization, our immigrant communities can live in the light of day, able to contribute more freely. Moreover, by better documenting who is in our country, we can strive for smart enforcement, fair proceedings, efficient processing and targeted enforcement against those who want to harm us.

Providing a path to permanence—Reform will provide earned adjustment, a path to permanent status for certain current and future workers who are patient and work hard. It acknowledges the integral part they already play in our society and enables them to participate and contribute even more fully.

McCain-Kennedy Legislation Promises Comprehensive Reform

The bipartisan McCain-Kennedy comprehensive immigration reform legislation has the following features that would go a long way to fulfilling the principles described above:

- A worker visa program allowing orderly legal migration of essential workers in the future
- An earned adjustment program for certain current undocumented workers
- Family unity provisions for certain workers
- A path toward permanent status for current and future workers who are patient and work hard
- Special protection for certain widows and orphans

H.R. 4437 Threatens the Most Vulnerable Migrants and Service Providers

The most vulnerable among the undocumented immigrants and refugees are those that LIRS holds most dear: unaccompanied children, women at risk, asylum seekers, torture survivors and families. In addition to criminalizing church workers and others who assist them, the legislation would

- turn them into criminals because they are “out of status”;
- deprive them of federal court review—an essential safeguard that ensures that deportation is proper (e.g., that this country does not mistakenly deport refugees back into the hands of their persecutors);
- increase their detention, even though the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom has concluded that asylum seekers are jailed in inappropriate facilities; and
- bar refugees from asylum because they are out of status or fled to the United States using false travel documents.

Footnotes

- (1) Pew Hispanic Center, "[Unauthorized Migrants: Numbers and Characteristics](#)," June 2005. The Center is a bipartisan research group; its estimate is based on the March 2004 Current Population Survey and the 2000 Census.
- (2) Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, "[A Message on Immigration](#)," 1998.
- (3) Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, "[A Message on Immigration](#)," 1998.
- (4) Congressional Research Service, "[U.S. Immigration Policy on Permanent Admissions](#)," February 2004, page 11.

*Page updated March 10, 2006.
Page last modified June 19, 2006.*

[Return to Top](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Who We Are](#) | [What We Do](#) | [Latest News](#) | [Donate/Serve](#) | [Info/Resources](#)