



JESUITS

Jesuit Conference
The Society of Jesus
in Canada and the United States

1016 16th Street, NW, #400
Washington, DC
20036

202.462.0400 v
202.328.9212 f
www.Jesuits.org

The Jesuits of the United States Oppose Anti-Immigrant Amendments to DHS Appropriations Bill

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

The Jesuits of the United States call upon the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives to pass a Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Bill free of harmful immigration amendments that seek to block or undermine the recent Executive Action on immigration.

Jesuit organizations throughout our country have long advocated for comprehensive, humane, and much needed solutions to our current broken immigration system. In the absence of comprehensive legislative reform, we support the President's use of his legal and constitutional authority to relieve families of the constant fear of deportation.

We urge all members of the House and Senate to reject harmful amendments to the DHS appropriations bill, and other legislative vehicles that would undermine the implementation of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Deferred Action for the Parents of Americans (DAPA) programs. In our many ministries across the country we know of many students in our schools and universities as well as many in our congregations who benefit from DACA, and even more individuals who will likely qualify for the DAPA program. Taking away this hope of a better tomorrow is neither in the best interests of our communities nor does it live up to the highest values of our nation.

We are also concerned about H.R. 399, the Secure Our Borders First Act of 2015 introduced by Rep. McCaul (R-10-TX). We find the bill's goals on "operational control" in the border region unrealistic in general and likely to result in the denial of basic humanitarian protections. H.R. 399 also lacks much needed accountability mechanisms in Border Patrol operations, for which we have and will continue to advocate. Through the Kino Border Initiative, a bi-national Jesuit ministry which serves deported migrants, we daily confront the harsh realities of the broken immigration system. Based on the experience of our border ministries, we have documented ongoing problems of excessive force, abuse of migrants and unsafe deportation practices in the border region and have provided ongoing recommendations to improve policy and practices.¹ Any border bill should address the need for Border Patrol accountability, with a viable complaint process for victims of abuse. We need common sense Border legislation to strengthen border communities, not militarize them.

We are also strongly opposed to H.R. 2278, the Strengthen and Fortify Enforcement Act (SAFE Act) introduced last year. Such legislation has been widely rejected by faith-based organizations (as well as many local law enforcement agencies), for its increased and inappropriate criminalization of immigrants as well as service providers, including clergy. The SAFE Act additionally expands immigration detention; promotes an immigration enforcement role for state and local law enforcement officials, (who are neither trained nor generally supportive of such a role), and decreases basic protections for immigrants.

Throughout last summer, Jesuits and other faith-based organizations across the board expressed our united opposition to legislation that would roll back critical anti-trafficking protections for children and asylum seekers in need of protection. We oppose the inappropriately named "Protection of Children Act" (H.R.5143) and the Asylum Reform and Border Protection Act (H.R.5137) introduced in the last congress. These bills would negate essential protections

in the bipartisan Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act signed by President Bush, and result in children being returned, without review of their individual cases, to situations that place them in grave danger from human traffickers, violent gangs and others who seek to exploit them.

We encourage all Members of Congress to reject these proposals, both in the current debate on the DHS Appropriations Bill and in future legislation. We reject proposals that would criminalize immigrants, militarize our borders and remove critical protections for children and other individuals seeking safety and refuge.

Together with Pope Francis, “we pray for a heart which will embrace immigrants,” because in his words, “God will judge us on how we have treated the most needy.” We urge you to remember the humanity of our migrant brothers and sisters as you consider these important immigration related issues. Going forward, rest assured that we will continue to challenge you to support immigration policies that treat our undocumented neighbors with the dignity and respect that all people deserve.

¹ Report available "*Documented Failures: the Consequences of Immigration Policy on the U.S.-Mexico Border.*"
Download the full report at http://jesuits.org/Assets/Publications/File/Kino_FULL-REPORT_web.pdf
Download a summary of the report at http://jesuits.org/Assets/Publications/File/Kino_SUMMARY_web.pdf