

Statement of Most Reverend John C. Wester
Bishop of Salt Lake City, Utah, and Chairman, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration
Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees, and Border Security

Hearing on Comprehensive Immigration Reform in 2009
April 30, 2009

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), I commend the Senate Committee on the Judiciary and Senator Schumer in particular for convening this hearing on the important subject of immigration reform.

The USCCB has long advocated for policies that respect the human dignity of immigrants, refugees, asylum-seekers, and other people on the move. In addition, the USCCB has engaged in several decades of advocacy with Congress on a long list of immigration-related issues. As one of the largest social service providers in the country, we provide basic services to immigrants, refugees, asylum-seekers, and other newcomers.

We believe that a properly-constituted immigration reform bill is the optimal way to safeguard the basic human rights of migrants, protect the integrity of the immigrant family, and promote the common good of our country.

Reform is all the more pressing due to the outmoded state of our current immigration system. We should no longer condone a hidden underclass of human beings in our country and should bring them out of the shadows to fully contribute to society. Moreover, too few channels exist for low-skilled immigrants to enter the country and work or join family members in a safe and controlled manner.

Recently, family unity has been compromised by a series of enforcement actions that have separated immigrant family members, including U.S. citizens. Enforcement-only strategies should be abandoned and replaced with a more comprehensive approach, including reforms in our legal immigration system.

In our view, immigration reform should contain a broad-based legalization program which provides a path to citizenship; a future worker program with protections for both immigrant and domestic workers; family-based immigration reform that reduces backlogs without harming the current preference categories; restoration of due-process protections, including revision of the three- and ten-year bars and restoration of judicial discretion in deportation hearings; integration and implementation provisions; and measures that address the root causes of unlawful migration by encouraging economic development in sending countries. Attached please find an outline of important elements necessary for just reform.

It is the view of the U.S. bishops that immigration reform needs to be enacted sooner rather than later. We urge the President and Congress to begin formulating appropriate legislation and to educate the American public about the importance of its enactment.

As we have seen in the past, enacting immigration reform will require resolve, diligence, patience, and prudence. As we move forward with the debate, we urge our elected officials to resist the loud and minority voices that oppose reform and which use harsh rhetoric against immigrants and those who support them. We firmly believe that immigration reform supports the common good of our nation and hope to work with Subcommittee Chairman Schumer and other members of the subcommittee toward its enactment in the days and months ahead.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.