

## COMMENTS TO THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE REGARDING IMMIGRATION BILLS MARKUP

Dear Chairman Goodlatte and House Judiciary Committee Members,

As a faith movement founded on the American frontier which upholds all are welcome at the Table of Christ, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) remains deeply committed to fulfilling our biblical calling to welcome the stranger and live out God's challenge that "the alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you" (Leviticus 19:34). In expression of these beliefs, we continue to seek comprehensive immigration reform legislation that is just, humane, and compassionate. We recognize that such lasting legislation can only come from actions of the House and Senate. In the current absence of comprehensive legislation, we have supported the President's exercise of authority to provide temporary relief to families in fear of separation; including parents and children who have faithfully served within their communities and in our churches for years. ***In this crucial moment, we urge you as House Judiciary Committee leaders to not support amendments which limit protections of immigrant populations, rather than offering support for family unity and protection for children, migrants, refugees, and other vulnerable populations. Specifically, we urge that you:***

**Oppose legislation such as the "Strengthen and Fortify Enforcement" (SAFE) Act, or H.R. 2278 (being called the "Michael Davis, Jr. in Honor of State and Local Law Enforcement Act", which would threaten to diminish community security, expand immigrant detention, and criminalize both immigrants and those who help them—including pastors and church members.** The long term commitments of our Disciples Women and others against human trafficking lead us to resist policies like these which threaten to push immigrant survivors of domestic violence further into shadows and limit their access to resource networks and police support. Provisions that compel state and local law enforcement to engage also in immigration enforcement would diminish trust essential for the effective policing and reporting of crimes necessary to keep our neighborhoods secure. We are concerned about the many ways that this bill would negate the Administration's protection of DREAMers, expand immigration detention, weaken community security, and encourage racial profiling by allowing persons to be apprehended if they are only suspected of being undocumented or deportable.


Please remember that putting police into the role of immigration enforcement agents often results in neighbors being more fearful to report crimes, lest they be deported for doing so. Under this bill, even our pastors or church members could be arrested for helping someone go to an English class or worship. Some provisions of the SAFE Act would also negatively impact refugees, asylum seekers and others fleeing persecution by extending laws that have falsely labelled pro-democracy freedom fighters and victims of kidnapping, extortion, and rape as "terrorists" if they were coerced to provide goods without their will to a terrorist group.

**Reject any rollbacks to the anti-trafficking protections for children and asylum seekers offered in the "Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act" (TVPRA) and support policies that protect children from being returned to traffickers and violence.** Our faith calls us to respect and protect children, as we remember Jesus' words that "to such belongs the Kingdom of God" (Luke 18:16). The "**Protection of Children Act**") and The "**Asylum Reform and Border Protection Act**") would eliminate the TVPRA protections signed into law by unanimous bi-partisan approval under President Bush, and would return children to situations of violence without careful review of their cases. We urge you to show leadership by finding ways to reduce the violence these children face in their home countries, rather than attempting to deport them more quickly back into threatening environments. Children seeking to escape violence should not be disallowed human rights protection that could save their lives, and should not be sent back into the hands of traffickers.

The "**Legal Workforce Act**" could lead individuals who are authorized to be denied employment or lose their jobs because of unfair hiring or firing practices, or due to governmental errors. We are concerned that the bill would not be able to be carried out by many small businesses lacking resources for the required verification processes. Working immigrants could be pushed into hiding, as the bill does not provide any pathway to citizenship. Further, the use of e-verify could keep immigrants from working to fulfill necessary jobs that help our economy and also support their own families.

We respect your opportunities to lead our nation in this time into our best values of community strengthening and humanitarian protections, and urge you to stand for safety and compassion through the suggestions above.

Sincerely,



Ronald J. Degges