



## Committee on Migration

c/o Migration and Refugee Services, USCCB

3211 Fourth Street NE • Washington DC 20017-1194

202-541-3227 • fax 202-722-8805 • email [mrs@uscgb.org](mailto:mrs@uscgb.org) • [www.usccb.org/mrs](http://www.usccb.org/mrs)

March 2, 2015

Honorable Bob Goodlatte  
Chairman  
House Judiciary Committee  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Honorable John Conyers, Jr., Ranking Member  
House Judiciary Committee  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I write on behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Committee on Migration to oppose four bills you will consider in the coming days. As you may know, Bishop Gerald F. Kicanas, bishop of Tucson, AZ, represented the USCCB before the House Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security at the February 11 hearing on three of these bills. Our more extensive analysis of these bills can be found in the testimony we submitted to the subcommittee and in the hearing record.

**The Legal Workforce Act (H.R. 1147).** As we stated in our February 11, 2014, testimony, the USCCB would not oppose a mandatory employer verification system if 1) it is accompanied by a broad-based legalization program, so that all workers have an opportunity to become legal and not remain outside of the system; 2) the system is phased in at a reasonable rate with objective benchmarks so implementation is feasible for both employers and the government; 3) it is not implemented until inaccuracies in the government databases used to cross-check identification and eligibility are corrected so that employees are not wrongfully dismissed or wrongfully denied employment opportunities; 4) protections are put in place so that employers do not use the system to wrongfully discharge certain employees; and 5) employees who are the victims of false positive assessments about their status are given the opportunity to correct any misinformation that lead to the false positive assessment.

Unfortunately, H.R. 1147 does not meet these criteria. We urge the committee to make these changes and to include the legislation in a broader package of immigration reforms, including a path to citizenship for the undocumented in our country.

**The Michael Davis, Jr. in Honor of State and Local Enforcement Act (H.R. 1148).** The USCCB acknowledges and accepts the role of the government in ensuring the integrity of our

border. However, H.R. 1148 would grant unprecedented immigration enforcement powers to states and localities, which we fear would ultimately lead to civil rights violations, racial profiling, and abuses of basic human rights. We also fear that the legislation could inadvertently increase crime in some communities. This is because some residents might be fearful to report crimes they are victims of (or witnesses to) to local law enforcement authorities and local enforcement would be required to police for immigration violations -- thus diverting limited law enforcement resources away from serious criminals.

**The Protection of Children Act (H.R. 1149).** The USCCB opposes H.R. 1149 because it would, among other things, repeal protections from unaccompanied children from non-contiguous countries and would make the screening of all children much worse by removing existing protections for children who are under the age of 13 and for those who lack intellectual capacities. We also oppose the measure because it would subject children to 30 days incarceration, violating standards found in *Flores v. Reno*, and it would manipulate family reunification as a means to identify undocumented individuals and initiate removal proceedings against family members of children, which we fear would result in additional foster care placements for children. Finally, H.R. 1149 would restrict these children's access to Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJ) and require those who demonstrate a credible fear of persecution to appear before an immigration judge within 14 days, an unrealistic timetable to obtain counsel and prepare a case.

**The Asylum Reform and Border Protection Act (H.R. 1153).** Mr. Chairman, the USCCB believes that our nation should honor our heritage as a safe haven for the persecuted, consistent with our international obligations and as a leader on human rights in the world. However, H.R. 1153 would take our nation in the opposite direction. We oppose H.R. 1153 because it would, among other things, unjustly raise the credible fear standard, denying protection to bona fide refugees; harm survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking by restricting parole authority, preventing them from being released to close family relatives; and re-define the definition of unaccompanied children, subjecting them to mass incarceration. It also would deny asylum to refugees who have languished in refugee camps for years and revoke asylum status to those who return to their home country for less than a "compelling" reason.

Instead of passing punitive enforcement-only bills, we urge you to address all aspects of the nation's broken immigration system and pass comprehensive immigration reform legislation. We look forward to working with you toward this goal.

Sincerely,

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Most Reverend Eusebio Elizondo  
Auxiliary Bishop of Seattle  
Chairman, USCCB Committee on Migration

